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THE PIONEER BOYS ON THE GREAT LAKES



OR: ON THE TRAIL OF THE IROQUOIS

THE YOUNG PIONEER SERIES BY HARRISON ADAMS

Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull



THE PIONEER BOYS OF THE OHIO,
Or: Clearing the Wilderness . . . \$1.25
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LAKES, Or: On the Trail of the Iroquois
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L. C. PAGE & COMPANY
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The Young Pioneer Series

THE PIONEER BOYS

GREAT LAKES

OR: ON THE TRAIL OF THE IROQUOIS

By HARRISON ADAMS Author of "The Pioneer Boys of the Ohio," etc.



Illustrated and Decorated by CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL

L. C. PAGE & COMPANY BOSTON * MDCCCCXII

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PREFACE

To My Young Readers: Many of those among you who have read the first volume of "The Young Pioneer Series" may be pleased to again make the acquaintance of the two border lads, Bob and Sandy, as well as others who figured in the earlier tale. Among these might be mentioned the Irish trapper, Pat O'Mara; Kate, the pretty little sister of our two heroes; Blue Jacket, a young Shawanee warrior, destined later to become famous in history; and Simon Kenton, perhaps the best known among the friends of Daniel Boone.

In this new story concerning the adventures of David Armstrong's boys I trust that you will find much to interest you. It is my earnest hope that such lads as read these stories of daring deeds along the frontier, in those early days of the history of our country, may not only find them intensely entertaining, but instructive as well.

I have tried to show what a sterling type of character, even in young boys, the stern necessities of those perilous days produced. Self-reliance was absolutely needed in order to successfully cope with the multitude of dangers by which the pioneers of the Ohio and Kentucky border were surrounded.

And, when you have finished the present volume, I can only hope that you will agree with me in saying that Bob and Sandy were splendid specimens of undaunted boyhood, and a credit to their Scotch ancestry. I also trust that you will be eager to meet them again at no very distant time in other fields of daring, whither the roving spirit of Sandy, who has taken Simon Kenton as his ideal hero, may, in company with his brother, be tempted to rove.

HARRISON ADAMS.

August 10th, 1912.





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The Pioneer Boys on the Great Lakes

CHAPTER I

THE ALARM BELL

- "HARK! Bob, what can all that shouting mean?"
 - "I'm sure I don't know, Sandy."
- "It comes from the other side of the settlement, doesn't it?"
- "True enough, brother; for you see the wind carries the sounds; and that is now in the west."
- "Oh! I wonder what it can be; and if it means trouble for us, after all these months of peace!".

The two Armstrong boys, Robert and Alexander, who usually went by the shorter names of Bob and Sandy, stood resting on their hoes

while listening anxiously to the rapidly increasing clamor.

In the clearing close by stood the cabin of the Ohio settler, David Armstrong. The time was close to early fall, at a time when the strained relations between England and her American colonies had almost reached the breaking-point. But away out here, far removed from civilization, the hardy pioneers were only concerned regarding possible uprisings of the red men; and the widening of their fields, where corn might be cultivated profitably, and tobacco grown.

Early in the preceding spring the Armstrong family, consisting of David, his gentle wife, Mary, the two lads, now fifteen and sixteen years of age, and a young sister named Kate, had left their Virginia home to dare the unknown perils of the wilderness in the hope of bettering their condition.¹

During the long summer, now drawing to a close, the dozen or more families constituting the little settlement on the bank of the Ohio had been joined by a number of new arrivals, so that by degrees they formed a strong colony.

Some of the fears that had oppressed the

¹See "The Pioneer Boys of the Ohio."

more timid of the first settlers now began gradually to vanish, as they saw their numbers increasing, with a corresponding addition to the fighting men of the border post.

Daniel Boone had been an early friend of these Ohio settlers. He it was who had really piloted them to this fair site for a town, on the hill which afforded a magnificent view up and down the beautiful river.

Taking the advice of the famous pioneer, a strong blockhouse had been built as soon as possible. This was completely surrounded by a high and stout palisade, behind which the defenders of the place might find shelter from the enemy in case of an attack.

Thus, even while peace seemed to be hovering over the section, these cautious settlers were constantly prepared for any Indian uprising; and there was even a code of signals arranged, whereby those most remote from the central station were to be warned in case of need.

Twice during the summer Daniel Boone had favored them with brief visits, while on his way back and forth between the distant Virginia plantations and his own settlement far down in the heart of Kentucky.

But Boone had little time for visiting that

particular season. While the Armstrongs and their neighbors were enjoying a comparatively peaceful summer, the reverse was the rule around the settlement that had been pushed far out on the frontier line and located at Boonesborough.

Enraged by the boldness of these pioneers, the Shawanees, aided by some of the Delawares, and even Cherokees, made desperate efforts to wipe out the gallant little bands that had been drawn to the outposts of civilization by the prospect of the rich land.

Rumors reached the Ohio settlers from time to time of the serious difficulties their fellow settlers were encountering. These served to keep them on their guard, so that they did not fall into a false sense of security.

Whenever Bob and Sandy Armstrong went into the great forests to seek game, or discover likely places where their traps might be set to advantage in the approaching autumn, they were always warned before leaving home to keep constantly on the watch for Indians. they met with one or more red men they were never to fully trust any professions of friendship, for the settlers of that day did not have a high opinion of an Indian's word.

These two lads were fairly well versed in the ways of woodsmen. They had always been accustomed to roaming through the forest after game; and, besides, they had received many a hint concerning the secrets of the wilds from a genial Irish trapper, named Pat O'Mara.

This worthy was in a measure possessed of the same unrest that caused Daniel Boone to keep almost constantly on the move. In the case of O'Mara, however, it was simply a desire to see new sights, and encounter novel perils, that caused him to wander through unknown countries, rather than any keen longing to open up rich farming lands to civilization.

Occasionally the Irish trapper dropped in unexpectedly at the Armstrong cabin; but after a few days' rest his uneasy spirit would again cause him to disappear.

This very morning, while they worked in their little patch of ground, Bob and Sandy had been talking about their quaint Irish friend, and wondering where he might happen to be at that time, since they had not seen him for over a month.

When the new settlement was in its infancy the Armstrong boys, feeling that conditions had changed, began to alter their dress. It was one thing to be living in Virginia, not so very far from the sea coast; and quite another to be hundreds of miles inland, beyond the great chain of mountains that served as a barrier between them and the oppressive tax collectors of the king across the water.

The homespun woollen garments gave way to those which nearly all hunters and forest rangers of that day delighted in. Thus, while both lads boasted of tanned buckskin tunics, and nether garments, fringed and ornamented with colored porcupine quills, besides real Indian moccasins, after the manner of the attire worn by Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton and the witty Irish trapper, Bob also owned a cap made of coonskin, with the tails dangling down behind; while his brother's was fashioned from the cured skins of gray squirrels.

They had, of course, left the outer garments at the cabin when starting out, that morning, to accomplish a little hard work in the fields that had been planted earlier in the season, for the day was quite warm.

Besides the sound of the ax, or it might be the crash of a falling tree, there were not many loud noises heard as a rule about the settlement. Sometimes a dog might give tongue as he chased after a rabbit that had ventured too near the borders of the colony; again, a proud rooster, that had been carried so carefully over these hundreds of miles of rough country to his new home, would wake the echoes by his clarion crow. It was a busy time for the settlers, and even the older children were compelled to do their share of labor in these first few months on the Ohio.

So it can be easily understood that, when the Armstrong lads heard that constantly increasing series of loud shouts, they felt the blood leaping through their veins both in curiosity and alarm.

Sandy, always impulsive, threw his clumsy hoe to the ground, and, jumping over to the adjacent tree, against which their flint-lock muskets leaned, caught up his own weapon with trembling fingers.

Bob was the more composed of the two, and it was his voice that now restrained his brother.

- "Wait, Sandy," he said, "we are not so far away from the cabin but what we can reach it quickly."
- "But, listen to all that noise, Bob," returned the other, fingering his gun eagerly. "Surely something has happened. Perhaps another

tree has fallen the wrong way, and this time done worse than what happened to our father."

The matter to which Sandy referred had been an unfortunate accident whereby David Armstrong had barely escaped with his life. A tree he was chopping had by some means twisted around in falling, so that the settler was caught under the heavy limbs. Only by what seemed a miracle had his life been spared. As it was, he still had an arm in a sling, and was unable to keep up the work he had planned, so that a double duty devolved upon his sons.

"No, I don't think that can be the trouble," continued Bob, slowly. "I heard no crash of a tree. Besides, I fear that there is a note of alarm in the cries; it is as if men were answering each other. There! that time I could almost hear what was being shouted, only the breeze changed a second too soon."

"Could it be Daniel Boone who has come, or perhaps that young ranger, Simon Kenton, whom you and I liked so much when we saw him long ago?" suggested Sandy, with new eagerness; for, to tell the truth, he had greatly admired Kenton when the young friend of Colonel Boone visited the new settlement, and he secretly aspired to follow in his footsteps. "No, I am afraid it cannot be that," Bob went on, soberly. "They might shout in that case; but there would be joy, and not fear, expressed. Hark! there it rises again! You have keen hearing, Sandy; did you not make out what our neighbor, Peleg Green, was calling then?"

Sandy turned a pale face toward his companion. These two boys had been through numerous perils in common, and were possessed of a great measure of courage; but, after all, they were only half-grown lads, and the sudden coming of this unknown peril filled them with dread.

"I am not sure, Bob," he replied, with quivering lips; "but I believe I could catch something that sounded like—*Indians!*"

His brother nodded his head at these words.

"I did not like to say so, for fear I might have been mistaken; but it sounded like that to me," he said, gravely.

Now it was Bob who dropped his hoe, and stooped to possess himself of his gun. Carefully he looked to see that the priming was in order, since everything always depended upon a small pinch of powder being in the pan when the time for firing arrived. The flint never

failed to strike sparks; but, lacking powder, these would be of no avail.

"Had we not better run for the house?" suggested Sandy, glancing over across the field toward the cabin, where the smoke arose from the clay chimney, the whole forming a peaceful scene in the sunshine of that late summer morning.

"They have not heard the sounds yet, I think," said Bob, as he failed to note any signs of excitement around the log cabin; "and it would be cruel to frighten mother, if there is no need. Let us wait a bit longer, Sandy. We can easily cover that little distance if there is necessity."

So the boys continued to stand there, gripping their guns, and waiting. Meanwhile it can be readily understood that both lads turned anxious eyes in all directions.

- "It seems to me the shouts are not so loud as before," said Bob, presently.
- "That might be because the running men have reached their homes," quickly remarked his brother.
- "Perhaps we had better go to the cabin. We can say we came in for fresh water, if mother wonders at seeing us. After all it may

amount to nothing; "but, hardly had Bob Armstrong completed this sentence, than a new sound came to their ears that sent them running like mad in the direction of the humble home in the clearing.

High above all else came the harsh notes of the alarm bell that had been hung in the blockhouse to give warning of sudden impending danger!

CHAPTER II

SEEKING REFUGE AT THE BLOCKHOUSE

- "LOOK! there is father coming out! He has heard it now!" gasped Sandy, as he ran.
- "And with poor little mother close behind him, waving her arms to us to hurry. But where can Kate be, do you think?" asked Bob, as a sudden suspicion came flashing into his mind.
- "Perhaps at the spring. She often sits there, and plays. Surely she could not be in the cabin, and fail to follow mother," his brother declared.
- "Keep straight on, and I'll go to see!" called Bob, suddenly turning aside from the straight course they had been pursuing.

Sandy hesitated, for he wished to accompany his older brother; but, during their many hunts, he had come to look upon Bob as the leader, and gradually fallen into the way of obeying any instructions the other might see fit to give. So he continued on to the cabin, where his parents were waiting so anxiously.

Mary Armstrong had darted back into the large front room, and now once more came into view, carrying the settler's trusty gun. Though his left arm was still in a sling, David Armstrong gripped the weapon with determination written on his sun-browned face. In defence of his loved ones he would forget his injuries for the time being, and, if need be, fight desperately.

Meanwhile, what of Bob?

The spring from which the Armstrongs secured their drinking water bubbled up from the mossy ground under the trees at some little distance from the cabin. It was reached by a circuitous path, well beaten from frequent pilgrimages to and fro.

Jumping over bushes that intervened, for he was too eager to follow the winding path even when he struck it, Bob quickly came in sight of the spring. His heart was almost in his throat as he discovered the well known sun-bonnet of his pretty sister, Kate, hanging to the bush that overspread the spring; but failed to see the slightest sign of the girl.

Cold with the fear that oppressed him, he continued to advance. What if Kate had already been carried off by some wandering red man? With the vast wilderness stretching all around for hundreds of miles, how would they ever know where to look for her?

"Kate! Oh! Kate!" he called, stopping short in his suspense to listen.

Then, to his great delight, a voice answered him; and the girl arose from a shady nook where she was accustomed to amuse herself.

Apparently she had paid no attention to the brazen sound of the alarm bell, being so wrapped up in her play. But, when Bob sprang to her side, and caught one of her hands in his, the girl's face grew white with fear.

- "Oh! what is it, Bob?" she cried. "What has happened? The bell—I didn't notice that it was sounding! Is there a fire? Has any one been hurt like father was?"
- "It must mean Indians!" answered Bob, as he hurried her along.

After that dreadful word had passed his lips there was no further need of urging. Kate's feet seemed shod with fear, and she even led him in the race for the cabin. There she was enfolded in the motherly arms and hurried within, to be hastily burdened with several small packages in case they were compelled to flee for safety to the blockhouse.

David Armstrong and the two lads stood without, guns in hand, listening. The bell had now stopped its wild clamor; but they knew that if it again burst out it would mean the worst. And thus, with every sense on the alert, they waited.

While peace had so long hung over the favored settlement on the Ohio, those who composed the little colony knew well what an Indian attack must signify. True, few if any of them had had more than the one experience when the pack train had been assailed in the night while they were on the trail; but they were not apt to forget the fierce whoops of the savages, on that occasion, which had been ringing in their ears ever since.

David had built his cabin after the most approved fashion known among pioneers of that perilous time. The walls had loopholes between the logs in certain places, where guns could be thrust out and fired into the faces of advancing foes. Even the small windows were secured with heavy shutters, fastened from within, so that it would require considerable skill and labor to effect an opening, should the inmates be besieged.

But, of course, it was not the plan of David

and his fellow settlers to remain thus isolated, if an opportunity came whereby they could gather in the blockhouse, which was always kept prepared for the reception of the colony.

Mary was now busying herself in closing and fastening these shutters. Bob sprang to assist his mother, ever mindful of her comfort, for he was a thoughtful lad at all times. Impulsive Sandy had just as warm a heart, but was more inclined to be careless and short sighted.

Then, without warning, once more that fearful sound broke forth! The bell was giving out its second call, which meant that every soul within hearing would do well to hasten without delay to the central point.

Perhaps, after all, it might prove to be a needless alarm; but, under the circumstances, no one could take the chance of being caught napping. For aught they knew those cruel Shawanees had finally overcome the valiant defenders of far distant Boonesborough, and, determined to wipe out every settlement west of the Alleghanies, were now advancing north to the Ohio River region with their victorious bands.

"Wife, that settles it!" said David Arm-

strong, firmly; "we must go at once to the fort!"

Each of them knew what was to be done. They had talked this thing over on more than one occasion, and arranged a system that was to be followed out in case of need.

The heavy puncheon door was closed, and locked with a ponderous padlock that had been carried into the wilderness when they emigrated from their former Virginia home. This being done, the little party started on a run across the open field.

How gloomy, and filled with mysterious perils, did that dense forest seem now! It was so easy to people its aisles with creeping, treacherous foes, armed with bows and arrows, with guns sold by the French traders to be used against the English-speaking colonists, together with tomahawks and scalping knives.

And, when they had entered among the tall trees that grew so close together, how every slight movement along the trail made them quiver with sudden dread, in the belief that they were about to be confronted by a painted horde of Indians, seeking their lives!

The blockhouse, fortunately, was not very far distant. When they began to catch glimpses

By now they had overtaken other fugitives, also making for the safety of the central point, and laden with the most precious of their possessions, which consisted for the most part of some family heirloom which they dreaded to have go up in flame and smoke, if the savages put their deserted cabins to the torch, as was their universal custom.

When they reached the palisade they found an excited crowd. The women and children were hurried inside as fast as they arrived; while the defenders of the post clustered near the gates, engaged in anxious communion.

"Who saw the Indians?" asked David, always seeking information; and both of his boys hovered near, with ears wide open to catch every word that might be dropped.

Anthony Brady, who exercised something of the characteristics of a commander among the settlers, by virtue of his age and experience, made immediate answer.

"Old Reuben Jacks, the forest ranger, spied the bloodthirsty villains," he said. "He came first to my cabin, which is further away than the rest. Then, as we ran, we shouted warning, and others, who heard, took it up. Here he comes now. Ask him how many of the red scoundrels he sighted, neighbors."

The man in question was clad in greasy buckskin garments. He had no family; but stopped with different persons whenever he came to the settlement. But, after the manner of the Irish trapper, old Reuben could not long remain in one place, and thus he spent most of his time roaming.

David quickly cornered old Reuben. The forest ranger was a quaint fellow, who carried one of those long-barrelled rifles which were so deadly in the hands of a good marksman. He had several rows of nicks on the stock, and the boys had always been curious to know whether these signified the various wild animals, like bears, and panthers, and wildcats, that he had shot with the weapon, or something perhaps more terrible. But Old Reuben would never tell.

"Where did you see the Indians, Reuben?" asked David, as others of the men began to cluster around, filled with curiosity to know the worst.

"I reckons as how 'twar 'bout three fur-

longs t'other side o' Cap'n Brady's cabin I see 'em,'' replied the old ranger in a mumbling tone, due to the absence of teeth in his jaws.

"How many were there?" continued Mr. Armstrong.

"I see three before I turned and run," Reuben, answered. "But the bushes was shakin' like they mout 'a' ben a host more a'comin'. They was armed with bows an' arrers, an' I dead sartin saw a scalp hangin' at the belt o' one on 'em."

Bob and Sandy exchanged horrified glances at hearing this. They had themselves passed through quite an experience with the hostile Indians early in the season, when one of the brothers was captured and carried away to the village of the Shawanees, from which he had finally been rescued, after considerable peril had been encountered.

To hear that Indians had been seen so close to the settlement caused a thrill to pass through the heart of the boldest man; and the hands that clutched their guns tightened convulsively on the weapons.

"Were they Shawanees, Reuben?" David continued to ask.

The veteran ranger shook his head, with its straggly gray hair that fell down on his shoulders from under the beaver cap.

- "Delaware, I reckons," he said, simply; and they believed that so experienced a woodsman could not be mistaken, for there were many characteristics that distinguished the different tribes, even among the famous Six Nations or Iroquois.
- "Are all here?" asked Captain Brady at this juncture; for they could no longer see any sign of new arrivals hurrying toward the blockhouse.

A hurried count assured them that all families had reached the stockade, with one exception.

- "The Bancrofts are missing!" cried one man.
- "And their clearing is almost as far away as mine! This looks bad, men!" said Brady, with a grave expression on his set features.
- "Something ought to be done, it seems to me," remarked David; for the family in question had been among the first dozen seeking new homes on the Ohio; and between them and his own little brood there had always existed more or less friendship.

"Who'll go with me ter look 'em up?" demanded old Reuben, hoarsely.

Every man present signified his readiness to be of the rescue party; but Captain Brady, of course, would not hear of such a thing.

"It would weaken our defence!" he declared. "We must hold this stockade above all things. Take four men if you wish, Reuben, but no more. And be careful lest you run into an ambush. These savages are treacherous at the best. They would strike you in the back if the chance arose. And if so be you have to shoot, make every bullet tell!"

Sandy pushed forward. He really hoped that the old ranger would pick him out as one of those who were to make up the rescue party. Always reckless, and fairly revelling in excitement, Sandy would have gladly hailed a chance to undertake this perilous adventure.

"Wait!" called out David Armstrong just then. "Perhaps, after all, it may not be necessary to go. Look yonder, Captain Brady, and you will see that the Indians are even now coming out of the woods!"

These words created a new spasm of excitement. Turning their eyes in the direction David had pointed, the gathered settlers saw

that he indeed spoke the truth; for several painted figures had just then issued forth from the shelter of the fringe of forest, and started toward the stockade!

CHAPTER III

THE BEE TREE

Some of the more impetuous among the settlers began immediately to draw back the hammers of their muskets; and one man even threw his gun to his shoulder, as if eager to be the first to fire at the Indians.

But David Armstrong immediately pushed against him, so that his purpose was frustrated.

- "What would you do, hothead?" demanded Mr. Armstrong. "They are so far away that your ammunition would only be wasted. Look again, and you will see that there are only four in all. Besides, they have their hands raised in the air, with the palms extended toward us. That means they would talk. It is the same as if they carried a white flag in token of amity. Let no one fire a shot."
- "But at the same time be on your guard against the treacherous hounds, men!" called out Captain Brady, himself the most inveterate hater of Indians in the entire colony, and never willing to trust one who carried a copper-colored skin.

Slowly the four red men advanced, continuing to hold up their hands. Evidently they wondered at seeing so great a number of armed whites clustered before the stockade. And the clanging of the bell must have bewildered them, since possibly it was the very first time such a sound had ever been heard by any of the quartette.

"We should not allow them to come too near," one man suggested, cautiously.

"True," called out Brady. "And an equal number of our men should advance to meet them. Armstrong, do you and Reuben, together with Brewster and Lane, step out. We will cover you with our guns. They have laid their bows and tomahawks down on the ground; but look out for treachery. Should you hear me shout, drop down on your faces, for we will sweep them out of existence with one volley!"

The two boys watched the little squad meet the four Indians, and enter into a powwow with them. Much of the conversation had to be carried on through gesture, since only old Reuben could understand the Indian tongue. But it was evident that the newcomers meant to be friendly, and were not the advance couriers of a band bent on burning the post.

Presently David beckoned to Captain Brady, and, as the other approached, he observed:

"They do not mean us any harm. On the contrary this young chief, who says his name is Black Beaver, wishes to trade some skins he has for tobacco. They have been south in Kentucky attending a grand council, and are on the way home to their village. He also wished to secure a small amount of meal if we can spare it. And, Captain, since we wish peace with all the tribes, I have promised to obtain these things for him."

When they heard this the men set up a shout, such was the great relief they experienced after the recent scare. Still, the cautious Brady warned them against being too positive.

- "How do we know whether they are deceiving us? "he said, coldly; for he could not bear to be friendly with any Indian. "Perhaps they are even now carrying the scalps of our neighbors, the Bancrofts?"
- "Not so, Captain, you wrong them," said David, hastily; "for yonder come those you mention, and apparently none the worse for their delay in starting."

After that there was no reasonable excuse for prolonging the matter; and so by degrees the settlers made their way back to their various homes. The Indians were treated well, and sent on their way with a supply of tobacco and a measure of meal, which latter David Armstrong himself supplied.

But little work was done the balance of that day. The result of the fright occasioned by this, the very first ringing of the alarm bell, made every one more or less nervous. Mrs. Armstrong would not even hear of the two boys starting out to hunt in the afternoon, as they had planned.

- "We'd better put it off till to-morrow, Sandy," remarked Bob, when he saw how the recent excitement had affected his mother's nerves.
- "I suppose so," replied the younger lad, with regret in his voice. "But I had just set my heart on trying to find that bee tree. We saw the little fellows working in Kate's flower garden, and flying off with their honey. Just think what a fine thing it would be, Bob, if we could learn where their storehouse is, and cut down the tree! Wouldn't mother's eyes just dance to see the piles of combs full of sweetness, perhaps enough for the whole winter?"
 - "That's a fact," admitted Bob, his own eyes

shining with eagerness as Sandy thus painted such a pleasant picture. "But it will keep, I guess, till to-morrow. We ought to get done with our task early in the day, and then for the woods. You know there is not a great stock of meat handy, except that jerked venison that neither of us like very well. I'd enjoy something like a saddle of fresh venison myself."

And so the more impulsive brother found himself compelled to bow to circumstances, always a difficult task with Sandy.

During the afternoon the young pioneers busied themselves in various ways, for there were always plenty of things to be done—water to be carried from the spring, wood for the fire to be cut and hauled close to the door, some of the first pelts which the boys had taken in their rusty traps to be attended to in the curing; the garden to be weeded; and so it went on until the descending sun gave warning that another night was close at hand.

Sandy had taken an hour off to go fishing in the near-by river. As usual he brought back enough of the finny prizes to afford the Armstrong family a bountiful meal that night. From woods and waters they were accustomed to take daily toll, as their needs arose; nor was there likely to be any scarcity of food so long as hostile Indians gave the new settlement a wide berth.

Bob came upon his brother as he was returning to the cabin with a bucket of water. Sandy was almost through cleaning his fish, and the older boy naturally stopped a minute to comment on their fine size.

- "I was just thinking, Bob," remarked the worker, with a shake of his head, "that perhaps we might see those same Indians again some fine day."
- "What makes you say that?" asked the older lad, quickly; for he knew that Sandy must have something on his mind to speak in this strain.
- "I think I feel a little like Captain Brady does about Indians," Sandy replied, "and that they are treacherous. Somehow, I just can't trust them, and that's the truth of it."
- "Oh! but how about Blue Jacket? Didn't he prove that he was a true friend to us?" demanded Bob.

The young Indian to whom he referred was a Shawanee brave who had been wounded in the fight the settlers had had just before arriving at the river. The boys had found him desperately hurt, and had cared for him, even saving his life when the irate Captain Brady wanted to have the "varment" killed as he would a snake.

In return Blue Jacket had assisted in the rescue of the Armstrong boys who had fallen into the hands of the Indians.

- "That's true, Bob," responded Sandy, readily enough. "Blue Jacket is our friend, but he's the only wearer of a red skin that I would trust. Now, of course, you're wondering what ails me. I'll tell you. I didn't like the way that young Delaware chief looked at our pretty little sister, Kate!"
- "What's that you are saying?" demanded Bob, frowning.
- "I saw him, if you didn't," continued Sandy, stubbornly. "He kept looking at her every little while even as he talked; for, you know, some of the women and girls came out of the stockade to look at the Indians. I tell you plainly that my finger just itched to touch the trigger of my gun when I saw him staring at Kate like that."
- "But—he walked over here with us to get the measure of meal father promised to give him, without accepting any pay?" Bob went on,

as if hardly able to credit the grave thing his brother was hinting at.

- "Yes, and I kept just behind him all the time," Sandy went on, "with my gun in my hands. I think he noticed me after a while, for he stopped looking. But I wouldn't trust that heathen further than I could see him."
- "Well, they have gone away," said Bob, as though that settled it.
- "How do you know that?" questioned Sandy.
- "Secretly, acting under orders from Captain Brady, old Reuben followed them for three miles, keeping himself hidden all the while. He reported that they had surely kept straight on, secured a canoe just where they said they had hidden one, and paddled across the river, landing on the other shore, and disappearing in the forest."
- "But Black Beaver plans to come back some day," Sandy continued, as he arose; "I could see it in his eyes. And I mean to warn mother, so that she can keep Kate from wandering away from home so much. If ever I see that Delaware chief sneaking around here it will be a bad day for him."
 - "We called them Delawares, but old Reuben

says now he made a mistake, and that they belong to the Iroquois. He told me that Black Beaver was a chief among the Senecas, and that his home was far away toward the Great Lakes."

"That may be so," remarked the unconvinced Sandy, starting toward the cabin, for evening was not far away, and he already inwardly felt clamorous demands for the appetizing supper that would soon be on the fire. "But even if he lives hundreds of miles away he can come back, can't he? He has made the journey once, why not again?"

Bob knew that, when once his brother got an idea into his head, argument was next to useless; so he wisely let the matter drop. He himself was not altogether convinced that they had seen the last of the proud young chief, though he hardly anticipated that it would be Kate's pretty face that might draw Black Beaver south again.

Many of the settlers passed an uneasy night; but there was no alarm. Talking the matter over among themselves, some of the men had arrived at the conviction that these representatives of the Iroquois may have been attending one of those great meetings which were being engineered by the Pottawottomi sachem, Pontiac, looking toward a combination of most of the various tribes, by means of which the French in the far North would be assisted, and the English settlements through Ohio, Kentucky, and along the Great Lakes be wiped out.

If this were indeed the truth, then Black Beaver had professed a friendship that he really did not feel, since he must have been forming some league with the warlike and merciless Shawanees, under such leaders as the detested renegade, Simon Girty, of whose cruel deeds history has told.

When the morning finally arrived without any sign of trouble, even gentle Mary Armstrong seemed to have recovered from her nervousness. She assented to the wish of the boys to go forth, and see what they could do in the way of securing fresh food. Before leaving, Sandy cautioned his mother about Kate, for he could not forget the covetous looks which the painted young chief had cast toward his pretty little sister, child though she was, being not more than twelve years of age.

"Be sure and fetch an ax along, Sandy," said Bob, just as they were ready to start forth,

with guns fastened over their shoulders by means of straps. "But, if you can help it, don't let mother see you. She would think it strange that we carried such a thing on a little hunt for a deer."

- "But what if we succeed in locating the bee tree, and cut it down; how are we to carry the honey home?" asked Sandy.
- "Time enough for that when we have won out," replied Bob, with a laugh. "Besides, I don't think we'll be more than a quarter, or at most a third of a mile away from home, unless the little insects are hunting at a longer distance than they generally do, as Pat O'Mara told me."
- "Have you got the sugar and everything along?" questioned Sandy.
- "Of course. I'd be a pretty chap to go off unprepared, wouldn't I? Now, watch your chance, and sneak the ax off. We'll surely need it to chop the tree down,—if we find it," Bob concluded.

But his sanguine brother never doubted in the least that success was bound to attend their efforts. He went into everything he did with the same enthusiasm and confidence.

Ten minutes later the boys were in an open

glade not a great distance away from the Armstrong cabin. Here flowers grew in profusion, even at this late day in the season; and Kate was in the habit of coming out to pick great bunches of the pretty posies, for she loved to see them around the humble cabin, brightening things with their color, and sweetening the atmosphere with their perfume.

Even in those days the methods of bee hunters did not differ very much from those which are in vogue in the woods to-day. The Irish trapper had posted the Armstrong boys as to the way in which a bee tree could be discovered, once busy little workers were found loading up with honey in the flowers or blossoms.

First of all the boys hunted until they discovered where some of the wild bees were busily engaged. Honey was not so plentiful at this particular season of the year; and, when Bob made a little sirup out of some yellow sugar he had been wise enough to fetch along, a bee was quickly attracted to the feast.

When he had loaded himself down with the spoils, and was preparing to fly away, Bob dextrously caught the little fellow. Taking care not to be stung he succeeded in attaching a long white thread to the bee's body, in such a way

that it would not interfere with his flying, yet could be seen for quite a distance.

Then the captive was released. As is universally the case, the bee arose in the air, and made a straight fly for the hive! That is where the phrase "a bee-line" originated.

- "Watch him now, Sandy!" called Bob, as he liberated the prisoner.
- "All right," answered his brother, eagerly.
 "I can see him still; and how he does spin along. There, he has disappeared now, right beyond that big poplar yonder. Do we go there next time, Bob?"
- "Yes," came the reply; "that gives us a start, and will bring us just so much nearer the hive. Then we must catch another bee, and repeat the job. And, as we may not find as many of them, once we enter the woods, we will put several in this little bottle I've brought along with me."

This was easily accomplished; after which they walked over to where they had obtained the very last glimpse of the laden worker.

"We've got the line now," remarked Bob; and can even go further into the woods, keeping on a straight road. But, for fear that we

may overshoot the mark, suppose we make another trial right here."

- "Just as you say, Bob," returned Sandy.
 "You got Pat to tell you lots of things he wouldn't repeat for me. I wonder could it be that leaning tree through there. Seems to me that might be a fine old hive, for it looks hollow enough."
- "But you remember Pat said they don't often select a dead tree. It might blow down, and spoil their stock of honey," his brother went on to say.
- "But they do find a hollow, don't they?"
 Sandy inquired.
- "Yes; usually the top of a tree that has a hole in it, or a big limb. They are wise enough to know that the rain must be kept out, and also that certain wild animals are mighty fond of honey. Now, here goes, Sandy. Watch close—there!"

Again Bob cast the gorged prisoner free, and the little insect, after several vain efforts, managed to mount upward on sagging wings and make off.

This time as before they marked the last appearance of the laden honey bee, and then a third trial was made. When a fourth and a

fifth drew them still deeper into the forest Sandy began to grow much excited. He kept looking all around him while his brother carried out the important operation of coaxing the bee to accept a cargo of sugar sirup in the place of the scarce nectar in the flowers.

All at once Bob looked up.

"Hark!" he exclaimed.

Sandy at once made a move as though about to sling his gun around from his back. Then he saw the smile on his brother's face; and, suspecting the truth, cocked his own head in a listening attitude.

- "I hear it!" he exclaimed, his whole face lighting up. "Nothing but the hum of a hive of bees could make that noise, Bob, could it?"
- "Look up into that sycamore tree and tell me if you can't see them flying around? Those must be the young ones trying their wings. Pat said they came out every fine day, and buzzed about. He told me he had found more than one bee tree just by tracing the sound. Once heard in the quiet forest it can never be forgotten."
- "Hurrah! then we've traced the little rascals to their house!" cried Sandy, as he threw his gun aside, and, clutching the ax, stepped forward to strike the first blow toward cutting

down the big tree in which the bees had their hive.

Bob did not try to discourage him, for he knew that when some of this enthusiasm had died away his turn at the chopping would arrive.

And sure enough it did; for Sandy gave out before a quarter of the task had been completed, though later on he would recover his breath and show a willingness to go at it again.

Both lads knew just how to chop a tree so as to lay it where they wished, and, having chosen the best place to throw the big sycamore, they kept hacking away with steady strokes, making the chips fairly fly in showers.

CHAPTER IV

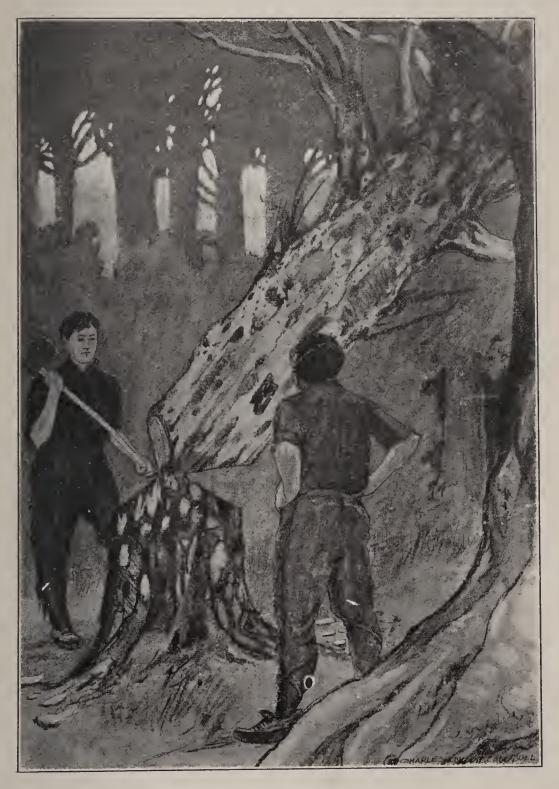
WATCHING FOR THE HONEY THIEF

"Whoop! there she goes over with a crash!" shouted Sandy, throwing his cap up into the air, as the tall sycamore came down just as they had planned.

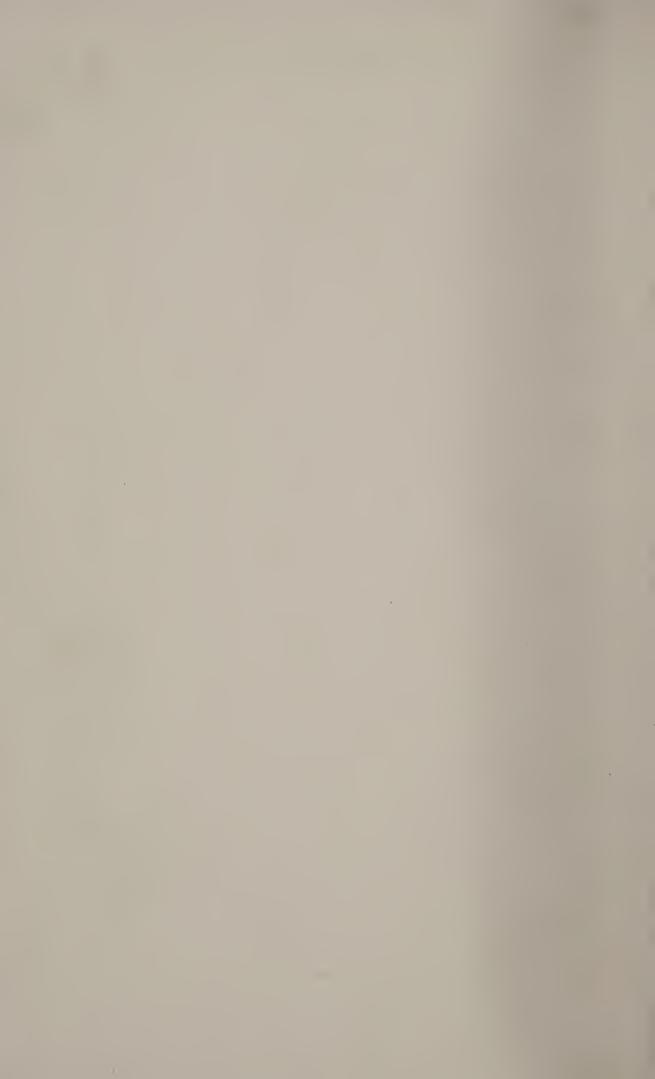
He started to dash forward as soon as the tree had struck, eager to ascertain what sort of prize they had drawn in the lottery; but his more careful brother laid hands on him.

- "Don't try it!" he exclaimed. "Why, they are so wild just now, they'd sting you to death!"
- "But how are we going to get at the honey, Bob?" demanded the younger lad.
- "You run to the house, and tell the others the good news. I'll be making veils out of this thin cloth. Then we have the gloves we used last winter. Bring a lot of pails back with you; for I think we'll need all you can find."

Sandy hastened back to the cabin, where he electrified his father and mother and little Kate with the joyful news. They got together every



"' WHOOP! THERE SHE GOES! ""



available vessel for carrying the expected spoils; and then Sandy led the way back to where his brother awaited them.

On the trail he was compelled to explain just how they had taken Pat O'Mara's advice with regard to tracing the honey gatherers; and what splendid success had resulted. Kate was singing with delight over the anticipated store of sweets that would reward their skill in locating the bee tree, for, in those early pioneer days, as a rule the only sugar the settlers had was obtained through boiling down the sap of the sugar maple tree in the early spring; or in discovering some secret store of honey in the forest.

Bob had arranged things completely to his satisfaction while his brother was away. Both of the young pioneers donned the veils and gloves, so that the bees might not take a terrible revenge on the destroyers of their home.

Bob had also made a smudge with which he expected to partly stupefy the angry little creatures. Smoke always frightens bees, for they seem to think that fire is about to devastate their hive. Nature influences them to immediately load up with all the honey they can possibly carry, with the idea of taking it to some

new retreat; and while in this condition they are comparatively harmless.

Presently Sandy came back to the spot where the others were standing in safety. He had a bucket almost full of broken combs from which the richness was oozing in a manner that set little Kate wild with delight. As for the good mother the sight was undoubtedly a pleasant one for her, since it promised many a delightful treat in the long winter months ahead.

David Armstrong immediately started home with the bucket, so as to empty it, and once more put it into service. Bob was still working there in the midst of the ruined hive.

"And he says there are, oh! ever so many more buckets of better honey than this!" Sandy had cried, as he brought out a second supply, in which the combs were less broken than before, and seemed newer.

"The whole air is filled with the perfume of honey," remarked Mary Armstrong. "It hardly seems right to rob the poor little workers in this way, after they have stored it up so carefully; though we do need it badly, for there will be little sugar in our home except what we make next spring."

"Oh! Bob says there'll be just oceans of it

left, spilled on the ground," Sandy went on, "and the bees will get it all, sooner or later. Plenty of time for 'em to seal it up for this winter. They always have ten times too much, and that's why some of it is so old and dark looking. Bob says he is not taking that if he can help it."

"Why, I could smell the honey half way to the house," remarked Mr. Armstrong, as he came up just then. "And, if there happens to be a bear within half a mile of this place, you can depend on it that he'll be prowling around here this very night."

"That was just what Bob was saying, father!" declared Sandy. "He showed me marks on the smooth trunk of the sycamore, where a bear must have climbed up ever so often, as if trying to reach in at the honey that was just too far away for him to steal. And some of the scratches were so fresh Bob says they must have been made only last night."

After numerous trips to the cabin to empty the buckets the pleasant task was finally completed. Bob declared that he had secured about all of the honey that was worth carrying away. There still remained a great store of the sticky stuff; but it was either spilled on the ground, or else so darkened by age that it did not seem worth while carrying it off.

"We'll leave it to the poor little fellows," laughed Bob; "for they're as busy as beavers right now loading up and flying off to another hollow tree one of 'em has found. And I think we're pretty lucky to get off as easy as we did, eh, Sandy?"

Sandy had removed the thin cloth veil that covered his face, and by this action revealed the fact that at least one angry bee had found a way to pierce his armor; for his left cheek was swollen so that his eye seemed unusually small. Some wet clay took the pain out, however, and in due course of time the swelling would go down.

It was not the first time Sandy had felt a sting from a bee, nor did he expect it would be the last. And, when he looked at the glorious fruits of their raid on that big sycamore hive, he forgot that he had suffered in the good cause.

"Well, do we try for that bear to-night, Bob?" he asked of his brother, later on in the afternoon, when he could see once more fairly well with both eyes.

"I think we would be silly not to," replied

his brother; "especially since we set the trap ourselves when we cut down that bee tree."

- "He's just sure to come nosing around, don't you think?"
- "Don't see how any bear could stand back, with all that odor in the air. Besides, it looked to me as if the old fellow might have been paying a visit to that tree every single night for a whole month, there were so many scratches on the bark. So you can just depend on it that he's got his mouth set for honey."
- "And then there's another thing in our favor," Sandy went on saying, as he glanced upward toward the heavens, an action that caused his brother to remark:
- "I'd wager a shilling that you are thinking of the moon being nearly full to-night, which is a fact. That is in our favor, and, on the whole, I'd be inclined to believe that we may be tasting a bear steak by to-morrow."
- "One good thing leads to another with us, Bob. First a prize in the way of gallons and gallons of prime honey, and then, to finish, perhaps a fat bear in the bargain! But, remember, you said I was to have the first shot at the old honey thief, if he does make his appearance?"
 - "All right," answered Bob, good naturedly;

"and I'll keep my word; but if I were you I would go slow about calling names. Please remember that there are some others in the same boat. Only, in our case, we succeeded in getting the spoils; and there we have the better of old Bruin, who climbed that tree so very many times only to have his trouble for his pains."

Of course the lads took their parents into their plans, for it might be their absence would worry the little mother, who sometimes still thought of that wild ringing of the alarm bell, and all it might have meant.

Shortly after they had had their supper, the two lads took their muskets, and passed out into the night. As they had said, it promised to be just a glorious opportunity to carry out such a plan as they had in mind.

The moon rode high in the eastern heavens, being not very far from full. Not a cloud seemed to dim the bright light, so that, for a short distance around them, things looked almost as plain as in the daytime.

As the two boys had done considerable hunting in common there was little necessity for talking things over, or arranging any programme. When the honey-loving bear came along, eager to satisfy his craving for sweets, of course Sandy would wait for a favorable chance to get in a fair shot. And, unless his aim were poor, or some accident occurred to otherwise mar the arrangements, that would wind matters up.

Arriving at the fallen bee tree, the young pioneers quickly decided just where they should secrete themselves. In doing this they exercised their knowledge as woodrangers, for much depended on the direction of the wind.

- "It seems to be blowing toward the home quarter," remarked Bob, as they stood there, fixing certain facts in their minds. "That favors us finely, because the chances are ten to one he will come from the other side of the opening made by our felling the big sycamore. So you see he won't be able to smell us."
- "How will this place do, Bob?" suggested the younger brother, pointing to what in his mind made a splendid hiding-nook, from which they could peer forth, and see anything that took place just beyond.
- "Could hardly be better; and so there is no use for us to look further," Bob remarked. "Pick out your stand, Sandy, where you will be able to shoot best. I'll be satisfied to take what is left."

This was soon arranged, and, having once settled down to wait, they tried to keep as still as though made out of marble. Talking was forbidden, even in whispers; and a cough would very likely have ruined the whole affair, since the bear, if near-by at the time, must have been warned of his danger, and with a "wuff" would turn to rush away.

An hour passed in this way. Fortunately the two lads were good waiters, and had proved this on many another occasion in the past.

Sandy had allowed his thoughts to go out to other scenes, and was even thinking of that fine young frontiersman, Simon Kenton, whom he admired so much, when he felt his brother touch him softly on the shoulder. The contact thrilled him, since it was the signal agreed on to denote that the lumbering bear was coming!

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE BEAR HUNT

- "LISTEN!" said Bob, his lips placed as close to the ear of his brother as he could possibly get them.
- "I hear him! He is over there, just where you said," replied the younger hunter, the words being whispered so low that they could not have been detected six feet away.
- "Get ready then have your gun up, so he won't see the movement. 'Sh!"

Bob said this because he knew that, with that bright moonlight flooding the opening, there must always be a chance that its rays would glint from the metal barrel of a moving musket. And even such a little thing as this might serve to startle a suspicious bear into making a sudden retreat.

The sounds now became more pronounced than before. Some heavy body was undoubtedly pushing through the underbrush, and in such haste as to be utterly unmindful of what noise was produced.

Of course nothing but a clumsy bear could be guilty of such an advance, caution being thrown to the four winds because of that tantalizing odor of honey in the heavy night air, — an odor which was making Bruin fairly wild with eagerness to be at the anticipated feast.

A panther would have crept slily forward, so that not even the rustle of a leaf might betray its presence, and even a butfalo would have advanced with a certain amount of caution; but a bear depends on its sense of smell to give warning of danger, and seldom moves with any degree of care.

Presently Sandy could hear him sniffling at a great rate as he pushed closer. The animal evidently could not understand why there should be such a pronounced odor of honey in the air. Many times had he come to this same spot in the hope of being able to bag some of the bees' store; but always to meet disappointment. But now there must be a great change in the arrangement of things.

Somewhere amid the foliage covering the bushes across the glade the big beast must have stopped, to look in surprise at the fallen bee tree. Perhaps he suspected a trap of some kind, knowing that his mortal enemy, man, had been

there lately. But that distracting smell drowned all his caution. Unable to hold out against it any longer, the bear suddenly lumbered forward.

Sandy saw him coming, but held his fire. In the first place the bear was head on, and he wanted to get a chance at the animal's flank, so that he might make sure to plant his bullet back of the shoulder, where he could reach the heart, and so bring his game down with that one shot. Then again, it chanced that there was something of a shadow, which served to partly hide the beast as he advanced.

Straight into the midst of the broken honeycombs did Bruin hasten, grunting in evident delight as he commenced to lick up the spilled sweet fluid, so dear to the heart of every bear.

Sandy managed to repress his excitement to a great extent. He had been hunting so often, boy though he was, that he no longer experienced the same intense thrill that would have almost overwhelmed him a couple of years ago, had he been thrown into such a position as this.

Slowly his cheek dropped down until it rested against the butt of his faithful old musket. Well did he know that the priming was in the pan, and that, when the flint struck the steel

sharply, the spark would communicate to the charge, with the result that the bear must be considerably astonished.

Unfortunately, however, Sandy could not see in that deceptive moonlight that a fair-sized twig happened to be just between the muzzle of his gun and the object at which he aimed. Had it been daytime he would have detected this fact, and avoided taking the chances of his bullet being slightly deflected in its swift passage.

The report of the gun was deafening. With his usual impulsiveness Sandy instantly leaped to his feet, giving a boyish shout as he saw the bear kicking on the ground, in the midst of the branches of the fallen tree.

Then, to his utter astonishment, and not a little to his chagrin as well, the dark, rolling object seemed to scramble once more to its four feet, and, attracted by his movements, immediately started to advance directly toward him, growling in the fiercest possible way.

It could no longer be said that Bruin was making a clumsy and slow advance, for, inspired by a sudden rage toward the object from which his painful wound had evidently sprang, the animal was rushing furiously forward.

Bob fired in the hope of checking this ad-

vance, that promised to upset all of their fine plans; but just then Sandy, in jumping back, chanced to jostle his brother, so that, even if the second bullet struck the bear at all, it certainly did no great damage. At least his swift if lumbering advance was not materially checked.

"Run, Sandy!" shouted Bob, as he realized that they were now facing an infuriated and wounded beast, with only their hatchets and knives to use in defence of their lives.

Sandy was not slow to take the advice thus given. He sprang away in one direction, while Bob took the other. Just why the bear should have picked out Sandy to follow, neither of the brothers could ever say, though they really believed the old fellow was keen enough to understand which of the fleeing lads had sent that first stinging pellet that bored under his skin, and made him so uncomfortable.

Bob was dismayed when he found that the animal had ignored him, and was chasing Sandy. With his usual generous way of taking burdens on his shoulders, Bob had really hoped to attract the bear; indeed, with this idea in view, he had even made more noise than was necessary, as he floundered along through the bushes.

When, however, he found that he had not been followed, he immediately changed his tactics. From running away he now started to follow after the bear, and, as he thus pushed through the woods, the boy tried to reload his musket, always a difficult task in those days of the primitive powder-horn, when the charge had to be measured out into the palm, poured into the long barrel, and the bullet in its patch of greased cloth pushed down with the ramrod; after which the priming had to be adjusted.

Bob was not making any particularly good headway in reloading, since he could not stay his hurrying steps long enough to do the right thing.

From the noise ahead he judged that Sandy must have succeeded in drawing himself up into the friendly branches of a tree, and that the furious bear was following close on his heels.

At least this would give the fugitive a little time, and perhaps, meanwhile, he, Bob, could come on the scene with his gun, ready to take a hand in the game.

"Hi! Bob, this way!" Sandy was shouting, at the top of his voice, as though his situation was rapidly becoming desperate.

"All right!" answered the one who was pushing along through the brush as best he could. "I'm coming, Sandy! Hold on a little longer!"

A minute or so later he found himself on the scene. Just as he had guessed, Sandy, being hotly pursued, and fearing lest he be overtaken by the angry beast, had on the spur of the moment clambered hastily into the branches of a tree. It was the result of sudden impulse, for surely the boy knew that an American black bear is always at home wherever he can dig his sharp claws into the bark of a tree.

Perhaps Sandy would never fully realize how he came to escape the animal's last rush; but it must have been almost by a miracle. Once among the branches, the boy did not stop an instant. The bear immediately showed an inclination to follow him aloft, and Sandy hardly cared to try conclusions with Bruin in his present winded condition, and with only his hatchet to depend on.

So he had hastily climbed upward. Looking down, he had been dismayed to see that the bear was making quick progress after him. He could hardly go to the top of the tree, and, as a possibility leaped into his mind, the boy started out

on a large limb that was some twenty feet or so above the ground.

Bruin did not hesitate a moment when he reached this limb, but started out after the young hunter. It was at that moment Sandy had sent out his appeal for help. He realized that he was in a bad fix, since the bear would either follow until he could reach his intended victim with his sharp claws; or else the combined weight of the two must break the limb, sending both to the ground.

Bob, having arrived under the tree, was making desperate efforts to finish loading his gun, so that he might bring the little drama to a close. But the bear all the while kept on creeping out closer and closer, balancing his bulk with wonderful skill upon the limb.

Sandy was impulsive in his ways; at the same time that bright mind of his was apt to originate many a clever ruse on the spur of the moment, and when desperation pushed.

Bob, keeping one eye anxiously turned upward while he pushed the bullet hastily into the chamber of his gun, saw his brother suddenly back still further away, so that the limb began to bend downward with his weight. The bear halted, as if loath to make any further forward



"THE BEAR ALL THE WHILE KEPT ON CREEPING OUT CLOSER AND CLOSER"



move, and watching to see what his human adversary might be contemplating.

Suddenly Sandy let go his hold of the outer branches. He had seen that he might break his fall by passing through the foliage just below, and was willing to accept the chances of receiving sundry scratches in consequence.

Bob fairly held his breath as he saw this bold action on the part of his brother. The bear crouched closer to the limb above, as though declining to be shaken from his hold. But, when the danger of this had passed, the beast started to back to the trunk of the tree, intent on reaching the ground again as speedily as possible.

Sandy had come through the lower foliage with a great scramble, very much after the manner of a floundering wildcat that had been shot while perched in a tree.

Bob waited only long enough to assure himself that his brother had reached the ground, even in a sadly dishevelled condition. Then he began to add the necessary priming to his gun, for Bruin was already starting to descend to renew hostilities.

Taking several steps forward, Bob arrived at the base of the big beech with its wide-spreading branches. It was evidently his intention to wait for the coming of the bear, and give him a warm reception.

Bruin, in his ignorance of such things as explosives, since his only adventures up to now had probably been with the arrows of the red men, gave little heed to this suggestive action on the part of the young hunter. He kept backing down with all possible haste, anxious to avenge his injuries upon these human foes.

But, after all, Bob found himself mistaken when he supposed that it was up to him to end the big beast. While the bear was still at least ten feet above him, the musket was suddenly taken forcibly from his hands.

"You promised me, Bob, please remember!" cried Sandy.

With his face bleeding from the scratches he had received in his fall, Sandy must certainly have presented a strange appearance just then; but the spirit of the hunter rose superior to any and all discomforts. That bear was his by rights, and he did not mean to be cheated out of his triumph.

Down came Bruin, looking over his shoulder as he dropped, and probably measuring the capacity of these two foes. But he failed to figure on the terrible power that lay in the odd looking stick one of them pointed up at him.

There was a sudden flash, a stunning report, for Bob in his nervousness had overcharged his gun, and while Sandy fell back with a bruised shoulder, the bear dropped like a stone at the foot of the tree. Sandy had clapped the muzzle of the musket close to the animal's ear when pulling the trigger, so that the result was never in doubt.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, as he scrambled to his feet, still clutching Bob's gun. "Did you empty your powder-horn in that charge, Bob? I'll be black and blue for a month after that recoil. But I got him, didn't I? He'll never have a chance to chase a fellow up a tree again. And, Bob, we're going to have that bear steak all right to-morrow, I reckon."

Which they did, sure enough, though, as Bruin was no youngster, it probably required pretty sharp teeth to enjoy the meal.

CHAPTER VI

SERIOUS NEWS

It was just three days after the strange bear hunt that the boys, on returning from a little trip to see what their traps might contain thus early in the season, found that the home circle had been widened by the coming of the Irish trapper, Pat O'Mara.

He was a jovial fellow, with a fiery red beard, and hair of the same hue falling far below his coonskin cap. His blue eyes generally twinkled with humor; but, for all that, he had long since proved himself a fit companion for such woodsmen as Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton, James Harrod, Jo Daviess and John Hardin, foremost in the list of pioneers who had carved their names on the pages of history by their brave deeds along the disputed border countries.

Pat was delighted to see the two Armstrong boys again, for they had been favorites of his ever since the days when, acting on his advice, David had decided to leave Virginia and cast his fortunes with the bold settlers along the upper Ohio. But wise Bob soon saw that, under all his fun, there was a seriousness about Pat that he could not remember noting before.

The trapper examined what few pelts the boys had taken up to now, and gave more or less advice about curing them to the best advantage.

"As the sa'son grows older the fur wull be thicker," he observed, smoothing the soft pelt of a red fox that had been recently taken. "And, av ye obsarve what I'm tillin' ye, 'tis a better price ye'll recave for the same from the trader, unless by the same token it happens till be a Frinchman ye be d'alin' wid. They do be wantin' to gobble the hull airth, I do be thinkin'."

This was always a subject upon which Pat felt deeply, for he was known to have a bitter prejudice against the French trappers and traders generally. At this time the French were in complete mastery of the valuable fur regions around the Great Lakes, and, being also located far in the south, at the mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans, it was the announced intention of the companies controlling these half-breed trappers to form a chain of

trading posts from Canada to the distant Mexican gulf.

Daniel Boone knew all about this tremendous scheme, and it was partly with the idea of blocking it that he had pushed out so far into the western wilderness, and influenced others to follow his example.

Dangers without number they must face in so doing; but, surely, if the wonderful widereaching valley of the Mississippi might be saved for English-speaking people, their efforts would be worth while.

While Bob watched the face of the Irish trapper, he came to the conclusion that Pat must have brought some unpleasant news along with him. This turned out to be the exact truth. As the two boys had now reached an age when they were to be depended on as defenders of the home, David Armstrong only waited until Kate happened to be sent on an errand to a neighbor, when he had Pat recount the matter for the benefit of Bob and Sandy.

There was much talk of a big Indian uprising all through the country between the Ohio and the lakes. Pontiac was again endeavoring to form a coalition of the many tribes, from the Six Nations, or Iroquois, in New York and Ohio, to the Pottawottomies and Sacs in the west, and the Creeks and Shawanees in the south.

Already, in many places, the red men were said to be on the warpath, and a trail of burning cabins marked their passage.

Pat had heard of these things, and, thinking of the good friends who had settled on the Ohio only the preceding spring, he had lost little time in making his way back again to the settlement that was flourishing so finely.

"It wull not be apt till come till ye, right away," he said in conclusion; "but 'tis just as well that ivery sowl be made aware av the danger. Niver belave that ye are safe from attack here. It do be a foine place to defind, located on a hill as ye are; but remimber that the rids are backed up by more or less av thim treacherous Frinch trappers and traders; and that they are sworn to wipe out ivery English post wist av the mountains."

The news quickly spread until it was known in every home. Men got together and talked it over, trying to so arrange their plans that, in the event of an attack, the defence of the blockhouse would be conducted in the best possible manner.

Scouts were sent out whose business it was to scour the forest many miles around, on both sides of the river. And, should one of these discover that they were threatened with an inroad of the Indians, it must be his duty to hasten to send up a signal of warning.

This was to be in the shape of certain columns of black smoke, which, seen by the next scout, would be repeated, until in this manner the startling news might be received at the settlement hours in advance of the coming of the fleetest messenger.

It was employing the tactics of the Indians to a good purpose.

These precautions having been taken, the settlers went about their daily duties, confident that they would receive ample warning should danger arise, and also that they would be able to give a good account of themselves in battle, did the reds venture to attack the post.

But it was the policy of every man, woman and child, from that time forth, to keep an uneasy eye on the sky line, especially toward the east and west. Men, as they worked in their maize fields, would pause every little while to sweep the horizon with anxious gaze; and, should one of them at any time happen to dis-

cover any sign of smoke rising, it was apt to be an anxious moment for him until he had assured himself that the column was a single one, and not triple.

Even such a hovering cloud as this could not keep the two venturesome Armstrong boys from going forth every day. Sometimes they had business along their trap line, for work grew pretty brisk as the season advanced. Then again it might be a hunt that engaged their attention. Whenever they had any extra meat on hand it was their provident habit to dry the same for use in the hard winter months ahead.

As yet the settlers knew not what awaited them, once the snows of winter closed in, for they had never spent such a season on the Ohio. Tales of bitter weather had come to them; but they were hardy souls, and believed that, if the Indians could come through such a yearly experience unscathed, they ought to be able to do the same.

Nevertheless, every good housewife started early to lay in all such extra stores as could be procured. The stock of simple herbs, drying in bunches from the beams overhead in the living room of the Armstrong cabin, testified

For two days Bob and Sandy had not been out in the forest save to look after their traps. True, only the preceding day, a fine fat wild turkey had fallen before the gun of Sandy, and been greatly enjoyed; but both lads felt an eagerness to once again go forth on a genuine hunt for larger game.

use it in soups or stews.

The tender-hearted and fearful little mother could not forbid them venturing forth, even though she sighed after they had gone, and wiped a furtive tear from her eye. Food was a necessity, and they had no other means for procuring it than in this manner. According to their belief, Providence had stocked these woods with game in order to provide sustenance for the pioneers who must blaze the trail of civilization.

Warned to be unusually careful, Bob and his brother once again wended their way through the mysterious aisles of the solemn forest, which had now become so familiar a field to them. Did they not know nearly every little animal that had its home there; and were they not on good terms with many that they scorned to injure, since their flesh was not wanted for food, nor their fur for trading purposes?

Two hours after leaving home the young pioneers came across the tracks of a deer, and, finding that the trail was fresh, they started to follow. The wind was in their faces, so that everything seemed favorable for stalking the quarry, should they find that the animal was browsing in one of the little grassy glades which they knew were close at hand.

And, true enough, as they thus advanced cautiously, they sighted a noble buck feeding as though all unconscious of danger. Foot by foot the boys crept closer, intent on securing such splendid quarry.

This time it was Bob's turn to fire first, while Sandy held himself in readiness to make sure of the buck if by chance his brother failed.

Bob was looking along the barrel of his musket when, without warning, a shot rang out from a point further away, followed instantly by a second and a third; but the buck, apparently uninjured, leaped off as though about to speed beyond the danger zone.

The instinct of the hunter would not allow Bob to hold back his fire, even though he was startled by this unexpected volley. And, after he pulled the trigger, the buck gave one great leap into the air, to fall a quivering mass on the moss-covered ground.

Both lads hurried forward toward the fallen deer; but Bob felt a quiver of apprehension when he discovered three burly figures hastening to arrive there ahead of them.

- "Oh! they are French trappers, Bob!" exclaimed Sandy, though he betrayed not the least symptom of holding back.
- "Yes, and we must be careful what we do!" remarked Bob, uneasily.
- "But it is your deer, for he fell when you fired!" Sandy declared, stubbornly.

In another minute the brothers had arrived at the spot, to find the foot of a dark-faced forest ranger planted on the dead buck, and three pairs of snapping black eyes looking at them in defiance.

Apparently their right to the game was about to be seriously questioned!

CHAPTER VII

THE THREE FRENCH TRAPPERS

"Keep cool, now, Sandy!" advised Bob, as he felt his brother trembling with indignation because of this bold attitude on the part of the trio of French forest rangers, who evidently believed in the maxim that "might makes right."

"But, Bob, see, they mean to take our game from us!" exclaimed the impetuous Sandy, who could not mistake the intentions of the French trappers.

One of the men was a tall, gaunt fellow, with the eye of a hawk. He seemed to be something of a leading spirit among his comrades. Bob felt that he possessed a cruel nature, and such a man, he believed, would only too gladly conspire with bloodthirsty Indians to surprise the new settlements of the English, and raze them to the ground.

This fellow thrust himself forward, and, scowling darkly, demanded in fairly good English:

"What for you say zat ze game is yours? Haf you not ze eye to see zat aftaire ze first fire ze buck he nevaire run far? And as for zat bullet you send, poof! it haf been waste in ze air!" and with that he snapped his fingers contemptuously, as though that settled the matter beyond dispute.

They were only a couple of half-grown boys, after all, and could hardly hold out against three burly men, accustomed to a strenuous life.

But Sandy was quick to see things; nor did he have the prudence to hold his tongue when he believed he was being wronged. No doubt he had been more or less influenced in his opinion of these French traders and *voyageurs* by what he had so often heard Pat O'Mara declare—that they were without exception the "scum of the earth, and fit only for treason, stratagem and spoils."

"But see, only one bullet has struck the deer in a place where it would down him—right here behind the shoulder!" he cried, pointing with a trembling hand at the blood on the red hair of the animal.

"Zat is so, young monsieur," said the Frenchman smoothly, and with a mocking bow; "and I assure you it was just zere zat I aim

my rifle. Sacre! Andre, and you, Jules, tell me if zis be not one fine shot!"

"But," cried the indignant Sandy immediately, "I tell you that is impossible!"

The tall and ugly Frenchman scowled, and then laughed harshly.

- "Say you so, my leetle fire-eater?" he exclaimed. "How it is zat you come to zat conclusion?"
- "Because," said the pioneer boy boldly, "if you look you will see that the bullet that killed the buck entered from the right; and we were on that side, not you. So the honor of killing this deer belongs to my brother."

The other Frenchmen evidently understood the point Sandy was making, even though not capable of speaking much English. They grinned, and cast quick glances at the darkfaced leader, as if wondering how he would take this thrust.

The tall trapper scowled savagely, and half raised his empty gun menacingly. But Sandy never gave way a particle. He knew that his gun was still loaded, while, in all probability, those of the others had not been recharged; three shots had sounded, proving that all had taken a chance at hitting the elusive buck.

"Zat is a great meestake," the fellow ejaculated, fiercely; "and it vould be well for you nevaire to repeat it to me. It makes me out von liar, and think you I vill stand for zat from a boy like you? My bullet he come out on ze right side, but he go in at ze left!"

"Prove that, and neither of us will offer any objection to your claiming the game," said Sandy, quickly; but the French trapper's scowl grew blacker than ever, for no doubt he caught the chuckling of his companions.

"It does not mattaire in ze least," he remarked, with his teeth snapping together. "Zis buck is my property. I take it as my right. All ze game in zis country is ours, and ze Eenglish steal every time zey shoot even von deer. Soon shall zey know who is ze real master here. Soon will zey repent zat zey come over ze mountains to zis land of the red men. Zey haf not take ze warning, let zem beware!"

Bob was thrilled by these words; they seemed to contain a threat of coming peril to the settlers. Undoubtedly Pat O'Mara had not brought his warning any too soon, for the crafty French trappers, many of them half-breeds too, had stirred up the Indians to the point of declaring actual hostilities. Why, per-

haps the real purpose of these three men south of the Ohio was not to find new trapping fields, but to spy out the settlements, and learn of their weak points, so that later in the season they could lead the hordes of painted savages against them, with torch and tomahawk.

Sandy was not yet ready to give up his claim to the meat. He knew well it had been the bullet from his brother's musket that had brought this noble buck to the earth.

So the boy stepped a pace backward, and raised his musket, covering the form of the tallest French trapper. The fellow was evidently astonished at this show of resistance from those whom he was disposed to treat as helpless, half-grown cubs.

"If you want that deer," said Sandy, plainly, "you will have to prove your right to ownership. Turn him over, and show us the place where your bullet went in! When you have done that I will own up it is your game. But, until you do, we claim it. And I have here a loaded gun to back up my claim, while all of yours are empty! Keep your distance, or I will fire!"

Bob caught his breath. He had known his impetuous brother to do many unwise things

in the past; but it seemed that he was now distancing his own record. Nevertheless, since the gage of battle had been thrown down, Bob was not the one to shrink from accepting his share of its responsibilities.

His first act was characteristic of the boy; for it was to slip a charge of powder into the barrel of his gun. If he could succeed in loading before any one of their enemies thought of doing likewise, there would be two guns to oppose any move the French trappers might think of making.

The tall man glared at Sandy as though he would give considerable to lay hands on the boy who dared threaten him. Still, somehow, he did not appear to fancy the way that gun kept pointing in his direction. And the face of the determined lad behind the gun told him that, if he ventured to make a single aggressive movement, Sandy would press the trigger his forefinger was touching.

The tall trapper muttered some words to his companions, who immediately began to back away, one moving toward the right, and the other toward the left.

Faster flew Bob's fingers in the effort to get that obstinate bullet rammed home before hostilities actually opened. Sandy was compelled to keep his eyes fastened on the man directly in front of him, so that he could not watch the others; but all the same he knew how to control the situation.

"Remember, you sir, that, if either of your friends makes a movement, it will cost you your life, for I shall fire instantly; and at this short distance there is no chance for a miss. Tell them to keep back if you want to live!" he said, firmly.

The French trapper spluttered in rage, but he saw something in the face of the determined young pioneer that he did not exactly fancy. So he again spoke in his native tongue to his companions.

They immediately commenced to hastily recharge their own rifles, taking pattern from the actions of Bob. That worthy had, however, by this time succeeded in removing his ramrod, after sending the patched bullet home, and was even priming his gun so as to be in readiness for action.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, as he menaced first one and then the second of the other Frenchmen. "This thing must be settled now and for good! You have forced us to stand up for our rights. Prove that the deer belongs to you, and we will not put in a claim."

The tall man was once more calling out, and how Bob wished that he understood French, so that he could tell what was said, since he feared that it was intended for their undoing.

Sure enough, as he turned once more toward the third trapper, he discovered that the man had disappeared, having dropped upon his face and rolled behind a neighboring tree. And, while he thus stood, filled with chagrin because he had been in a measure outwitted, the second fellow also made a quick leap that gave him temporary shelter behind another stump.

The situation was becoming very much strained, and, with their three enemies thus widely scattered, Bob saw that he and his brother could not long hope to hold the whip hand over the situation.

It seemed too bad to think that, after all, they must draw off, and allow these rascally allies of the Indians to lay hold of the game that by rights belonged to the Armstrong larder. But, perhaps it would be best to believe that "the one who fights, and runs away, may live to fight another day."

"Come, Sandy, we must go, and admit de-

feat," he said, quickly, fearing lest even now he find some trouble in convincing his hotheaded brother that their best policy lay in retreating while they had the chance.

Sandy shrugged his shoulders as if to show that he did not like to abandon such a fine buck when they had the best right to it.

"If we have to fight for it, let us begin by knocking over this rascal here!" he exclaimed, waving his levelled musket menacingly at the dark-faced trapper.

"Wait, Sandy!" cried Bob. "See, there are other men coming on the run. If they prove to be Frenchmen we must get away! But perhaps they may be friends, and then we shall soon see to whom the deer belongs."

He had hardly spoken when Sandy let out a yell of delight.

"It is Simon Kenton! That is he waving his cap to us. Now hold your own, Bob, and do not think of leaving this game. They will see fair play on both sides. And I say again, if the deer belongs to these men I would not claim it for worlds. Huzza! what great luck we are having!"

Bob, too, was thrilled by the sight of Kenton, with several other men in buckskin, advancing

through the forest, and closing in on the scene of the dispute.

The trio of French trappers, unwilling to risk the chances of flight, immediately assumed a different aspect. Smiling affably, they waited to greet the newcomers, as though now perfectly willing to submit the question to arbitration.

Simon Kenton, tall and lithe as a sycamore, hastened to shake hands with each of the Armstrong boys. They had been favorites of the young woodranger ever since the first day he met them, when, with Daniel Boone, he had joined the pack-horse caravan headed for the banks of the Ohio.

- "What's going on here?" he asked in his musical voice, as his keen eyes took in the belligerent attitude of the two lads, and the fact that they were confronted by a trio of French trappers; for the other two had now come out from their places of hiding.
- "Oh! only a dispute as to who shot the buck," said Sandy, as though such an event were of every day occurrence with him.
- "We were over yonder, while these men came from that direction," said Bob, as he pointed one way and another. "I was just

about to fire, when there came a shot. The buck bounded off. Then two more guns spoke; but the deer only leaped the harder. I pressed the trigger and the buck dropped. When we came up, these men met us, and claimed the game. We told them that the only fatal bullet had entered from the right, and offered to prove our claim, or hand the prize over to them; but they said they meant to have it anyway. We were just trying to back up our words when you happened to come up. And, Sandy, we'll let Simon Kenton decide whose bullet killed this fine buck.''

Kenton looked toward the three French trappers, whom he seemed to know.

"Fairer words were never spoken, Armand Lacroix; and you know it," he said, sternly. "You would follow out the custom of your partner, Jacques Larue, with whom my young friends are already acquainted, and claim everything in sight because you are French, and they are English. But that sort of game will not go here. Bagstock, take a look at the buck, and tell me whether the bullet has gone clear through the body."

One of his comrades accordingly stooped, and threw the dead animal over on the other

side; when it was plainly seen that there was no mark of a wound in the forequarter.

"I knew it!" cried Sandy, triumphantly, as he grinned at the baffled Frenchman.

"There you see, Lacroix," observed Kenton, with a nod and a smile, "the lead that brought this buck low came from the right; and this lad says he and his brother were on that quarter, while you stood on the left. But thar's a fairer way to decide the truth than that. Hand me your gun, Lacroix; I promise that you shall have it again."

The French trapper looked daggers at the young ranger; but the English were now five to three French, and he knew the temper of Daniel Boone's friend too well to test it to the breaking point.

Accordingly he reached out his discharged rifle, one of those long-barrelled affairs that carried so deadly a messenger, when properly aimed.

"Bagstock, dig for the bullet that killed the buck," Kenton went on.

Sandy's face was wreathed in a huge grin; for he instantly saw what the woodsman had in mind.

"Now you will learn the truth, M. Lacroix,"

he said, exultantly, as the burly forest ranger, laying his rifle aside, took out his hunting knife, and commenced to hack at the side of the deer, following the course of the bullet.

The French trapper did not appear to be at all pleased with the probable outcome. Truth to tell, he had already discounted the result in advance, for he knew full well that himself and comrades had not the first claim on the buck.

Presently Bagstock uttered an ejaculation of satisfaction, and, picking something up, handed it to Simon Kenton. It was the bullet that had brought down the deer, a trifle dented from striking the animal's bones, but apparently in good shape for the purposes of identification.

"Just as I thought," said Kenton, laughingly. "This bullet fits only in a musket such as these boys carry. Nobody could ever get it in a smaller calibre rifle like the ones you and your comrades own, Lacroix. So, that is settled, and settled the right way. And your road lies yonder. Bagstock, you and Andrew keep an eye on our friends, and if they so much as turn around within a mile of this, you know what to do!"

And thus the three baffled French trappers went away. They grumbled not, seeming to

accept their defeat as the fortune of war; but the malignant look Armand Lacroix cast toward the two brothers told what was on his mind. If by chance they ever ran across his path again, and fortune was kind to him, the Frenchman would not be apt to forget how he had been baited by a couple of half-grown Englishspeaking American lads. And perhaps, under such conditions, he might be able to make things rather interesting for Bob and Sandy, particularly the latter.

CHAPTER VIII

SIMON KENTON, THE BORDERER

When the boys returned to the settlement, bringing with them the buck, and accompanied by Simon Kenton and his two companions, they were warmly greeted.

The story of how Sandy had braved the three crafty French trappers soon went abroad, and many congratulated the boy on his firm stand. They knew well that it was this secret French influence which was doing so much to make the Indians dig up the hatchet that had been buried at the treaty of Fort Stanwix some years previous; and in every breast existed the same detestation for the cowardly traders who, for the sake of gain, would encourage the savages to resort once more to the torch, and the murderous tomahawk.

Several men vanished from the post shortly after the boys returned. It was suspected that they had banded together with the idea of pursuing the trio of Frenchmen, and putting it out of their power to carry their news to other In-

dian villages; for Pat O'Mara, who was one of this band, declared it to be his belief that these men were messengers, sent to bear the wampum belt of the great leader, Pontiac, to chiefs who were even then hesitating over what to do.

The men came back on the next day, and, while none of them would say a word about the result of their mission, it was not believed that success had followed them, for they exhibited no symptoms of satisfaction.

Simon Kenton was a great favorite in this Ohio River settlement. As the boon companion of the leading pioneer he would have been warmly welcome; but, besides that, he had such a genial nature that he made friends wherever he went. Contact with Daniel Boone was also doing wonders for this fine young borderer. By slow degrees he was conquering his numerous faults in the line of hasty temper, and quick action, that in the past had brought him so much trouble.

His place among the men of the early days along the great river has long been recognized in history. While he lacked some of the wonderful qualities that made Boone beloved among the whites, and both feared and respected by the Indians, still Kenton has always held a strong place in the affection of those who know the wonderful exploits with which his life was crowned.

Although Kenton was possessed of a particularly amiable disposition among his friends, it is likely that his equal for recklessness was never known. History tells us that, during the course of his adventurous life along the border with Boone, and alone, he many times fell into the hands of the Indians, though they seemed unable to hold so slippery a customer.

Eight times he was condemned to run the gauntlet, always one of the most cruel of the Indian inventions of horror; three times was he tied to the stake, sentenced to be burned alive; and once he was nearly slain by an ax.

And yet, in spite of all these things, Simon Kenton lived to a green old age, dying in 1836 within sight of the very spot where the Indians, fifty-eight years before, had made preparations to torture him to death.

While at the settlement of our friends Kenton and his two comrades made their head-quarters in an empty cabin, deserted by a settler who had gone back to the fair fields of Virginia because his wife grieved for her family,

and was too timid to stay where at any hour they could expect to hear the wild whoops of hostile Indians.

Of course, as soon as it could be done in secret, the head men of the settlement sought to find out from Kenton whether the news brought by Pat O'Mara was founded on facts, or the result of a lively imagination.

"I have been in the eastern country," replied the forest ranger, seriously; "and can only say this, that thar are all the signs of a big outbreak. Down in Kentucky Boone has had to be on the defensive all the time, because the Shawanees did not feel themselves bound by the Fort Stanwix treaty. My friends, I regret to say to you that the outlook is dark. Be on your guard. If this winter passes without a general war on the part of half a dozen tribes, some of us will believe that we are poor prophets."

And, later on, he told in detail what he and his friends had seen and heard. The news was distressing to these people, so many hundreds of miles away from help, and dependent on themselves alone to combat the gathering clouds.

But there were brave hearts among those

early pioneers. Even the women refused to believe that they were to be overwhelmed, and made to perish from the face of the earth. From such stock have our forefathers sprung, and, looking back, we have need of every adjective at our command to express admiration for the valor of these Ohio pioneers.

David Armstrong felt that he had much to be thankful for in those days. His wife and little family were in perfect health; but there was one thing that seemed to be giving the pioneer anxiety.

Never did any one come from over the distant mountains but that Mr. Armstrong was eagerly inquiring whether the newcomer carried a letter for him. Thus far disappointment had always been his portion; yet, after each period of deep despondency, he would once more pick up fresh hope, and it was usually the brave soul of his gentle wife that put new ambitions in his breast.

Years ago in Richmond, Mr. Armstrong had been tricked by a cousin, in whom he placed implicit confidence. The result had been that this rascal had virtually stolen all of Mr. Armstrong's heritage, which he had brought from the old country.

David had gone to law about it, but, even in this early day, the delays were most vexatious; and for years had the case been pending. Mr. Armstrong never lost hope that, in the end, it would be decided in his favor, and that he would be summoned to Richmond to take back that which had been fraudulently wrested from his hands.

He indulged in many rosy-tinted dreams of what wonderful things he would bring back with him, to add to the happiness of his little brood, should such a wonderful piece of good luck come his way.

Mary and he had decided that they liked this beautiful country too well to ever return again to Virginia. Come what would, they belonged here on the river that flowed between forest-clad banks into the golden west.

Pat O'Mara still hung about the settlement, though at any time he was apt to disappear. While present, he made his home with the Armstrongs, and there never was a more welcome guest at a pioneer's cabin than the Irish trapper with these good friends.

Bob and Sandy took him over the line of their traps, and learned many clever little tricks that would count when the real time came for taking fur-bearing animals. Up to now their efforts in that line had been more in the way of experiments, so as to get used to handling traps, and keeping the sly little animals from scenting the presence of human beings around their haunts.

Kenton and his friends had gone on their way. They were really scouting, in the hope and expectation of learning something about the anticipated Indian uprising, so that the weaker settlements could withdraw in time to more secure quarters; for the winter, at least, combining with stronger posts.

"I wanted father to let me go with Simon Kenton," said Sandy, despondently, the day after the departure of the frontiersman.

"But of course he refused," said Bob, quickly; "and rightly, too. You are too young to be wandering around the country as he does, Sandy; and think, what would mother do without you? It's all well enough for Kenton, who is a man full grown, and has no home. You belong here, Sandy, with us. How could I attend to all the traps, and hunt in the bargain, without you? I am glad father said no; glad for my own sake, glad for mother, and glad for you, too."

The reference to his mother touched the heart of impulsive Sandy.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I guess it is best I stay for another year or so, anyway; but, some day, I'm going to follow in the footsteps of Simon Kenton."

Bob said no more, knowing the nature of his brother only too well, and by another day Sandy had apparently quite gotten over his grieving.

September was now moving along very fast, and, almost before they would be aware of it, the great forest trees must be taking on the red and gold of autumn hues, as the first frost came down from the north.

Each time the boys went out they set another trap, until the entire number they owned were in use. The prospect ahead looked rosy, indeed, if only that story in connection with the threatened Indian war could be forgotten.

Sometimes it came to Bob in the dead of night, to cause him more or less grave thought, for his was a nature unlike Sandy's light-hearted one; and, before Pat O'Mara departed, he had once more impressed upon the older lad the necessity for unusual care in making their

rounds of the traps, or venturing into the surrounding forest in search of game.

And, on this night in question, it seemed to Bob that he awoke from a very vivid dream, in which the settlement was being attacked by countless painted Indians. So startling an effect did the dream have upon him that he even sat up on his cot and listened, as though he half expected to hear the distant yells of dancing red men as they surrounded the stockade.

All seemed still, however, and Bob was about to drop back again when, glancing in the direction of the little window, he was surprised to find that a flickering glow came and went, as though a fire might be burning without.

Hastily the boy crept from under his covers, and went over to open the door, in order to thrust his head outside; but, hardly had he done this, than he received a shock that dazed him, for he discovered that the entire side of the cabin was in flames!

CHAPTER IX

THE MOCCASIN TRACKS THAT TOED - IN

" FIRE!"

Wildly Bob gave tongue, as he managed to draw on his garments. The whole of the cabin's inmates appeared on the scene in answer to his cries, and all of them filled with the gravest apprehensions.

There was no need to ask questions, for Bob had flown out of the door, leaving it open behind him.

"Get buckets, and dip into the barrel!" shouted Mr. Armstrong.

Already had Bob started his work against the devouring flames, which were licking up the side of the cabin, as though bent on destroying the weeks of work on the part of the pioneers, in this one dreadful half-hour.

Even Kate helped, finding some sort of pan in which she could carry water, and dash it on the burning logs. Bob quickly saw that the barrel would soon be exhausted at this rate. They must have a further supply of water if they hoped to battle successfully with the greedy flames.

"Come with me to the spring, Sandy!" he cried huskily. "We must have more water! This way, Mr. Brewster, with your bucket! And please run with all your might!"

A neighbor had arrived on the scene, for the cries of the family as they fought the devouring element had been heard, and there was no need to ask what had happened, since the flames could be seen for some distance.

Mr. Brewster had come up with his musket in one hand, and an empty bucket gripped in the other. Thus he was prepared for almost anything that might arise, for, with all this talk of an Indian uprising in the air, it was only natural that he might suspect there would be need for the firearm as well as the wooden pail.

The three hastened to the spring, in order to secure a further addition to the supply of water. Before they had gone half way another figure showed up, being a second neighbor who, like Mr. Brewster, had come prepared to cope with any emergency. He joined the procession of runners; and in this order they arrived at the spring, which was located about eighty yards

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from the Armstrong cabin, and used by several families in common.

Fortunately it was of some depth, so that quite a pool formed at its "run-off." Here they filled their buckets, and started back just as fast as they could go without spilling the contents.

Others began to arrive, for, as the clamor increased, every cabin in the settlement yielded up its quota of eager assistants. In a little community like this, where hundreds of miles separated them from civilization, with untold perils surrounding them, the interest of one must ever be the interest of all. They knew not what terrible danger might be abroad; but, with the bold spirit that marked the early pioneer, they sallied forth to grapple with whatever threatened.

And these men did yeoman service. Some slapped at the creeping flames with garments that had been saturated with water; others beat frantically with branches and bushes; while the few who had means for carrying water dashed this natural enemy of fire on the flames.

Thus it was only a short time before they got the fire under control, for many hands made light work. Some damage had been done, it is true, and Mr. Armstrong would have to do more or less repairing to his cabin ere it would be in as good shape as before the fire. Still, he and his good wife felt that they had much for which to be grateful.

"How did it start?" asked old Anthony Brady.

There was latent suspicion in his voice, for he had seen that the fire had all been on the outside, which would indicate that it certainly could not have started in the interior from a smouldering brand falling beyond the hearth, such as had been the case in one other alarm they had had earlier in the season, before the cool nights had gone.

"I think I can make a guess," remarked Mr. Brewster, who had also been looking about while actively engaged in fighting the devouring element. "You can see that it was on the side where Mrs. Armstrong has her soap-kettle. She must have left a bed of red ashes after rendering down the bear fat with the lye, and, during the night, the wind swept some of these against the logs. Perhaps there was a handful of dead leaves to act as tinder; and the rest came easy."

"But," said Bob's mother, quickly, "I did not have a fire under the soap-kettle yesterday, nor the day before. Indeed, it is a full week now since I used it."

The men looked quickly at one another. They realized now that there might be something more about this midnight burning than any of them had ventured to imagine. Log cabins do not take fire so easily, in the middle of the night, without some human agency back of the catastrophe.

"Come," said Anthony Brady, hoarsely, this must be looked into. If some wicked person put the torch to this cabin, we ought to find out who he was, and punish him accordingly."

By this time there were fully a dozen men around, and nearly all of them carried guns of some pattern, either the long rifles of the day, or muskets that at close quarters were just as deadly.

Stern faces grew even more set as they heard their leader thus declare himself. If a house-burner were abroad, then he must surely belong to one of two species—for they could not imagine any but a sneaking Indian, or a malicious French trapper, doing so mean a deed.

Several of the most expert trailers began to circle around at some little distance from the cabin. They carried either rude horn lanterns, or else burning torches of fat pine, with which each cabin was usually well supplied, since candles were not plentiful in those days, and had to be made, like the soap, from the surplus fat taken from some bear that had been secured

Bob and Sandy came together while thus employed.

for food.

- "Did you hear what old Reuben Jacks said, Bob?" asked the older boy, meaningly.
- "You mean about that Frenchman, Armand Lacroix?" the other lad replied.
- "Yes," Sandy went on, eagerly; "they hunted for him high and low, but without success. Reuben believes that he, or one of his men, must have done this out of revenge, because we defied him and took away the buck when he had declared he meant to possess it."
- "It may be so," Bob observed, thoughtfully.
 "I have heard so much about the treachery and trickery of those traders from the north, that I would not think it beyond one of them to try and burn a cabin in the night. That man hates us both, and you particularly, because of

the way you held your gun at his head. I shall never forget how his black eyes glittered as he looked at you on leaving. It was as if he wanted to remember you for years to come."

- "Listen! some one is calling!" exclaimed Sandy just then
- "It is old Reuben Jacks, and he has made some sort of discovery; or else he would not lift his cracked voice in that shrill way. Come, Sandy, let us run thither, and see what it may be."

The two boys, both of whom were now carrying their guns, even though but partly dressed, made a dash toward the spot where the shouts went up. They overtook several others; and in another minute quite a group had gathered around the figure of the gaunt old woodranger.

- "What is it, Reuben; what have you found to give tongue that way? " demanded Anthony Brady, with authority in his heavy voice.
- "Look, neighbors!" said the other, pointing down toward his feet.
- "Footprints leading away from the cabin!" exclaimed one.
- "And made by an Injun, too, for the toes turn in!" came from another.
 - "Reuben, you have made a valuable discov-

ery," Brady remarked, after he had himself bent over to examine the footprints in the soft soil, which the keen and practised eye of the old man had detected. "An Indian has been here after night set in; for you all remember there was just a little rainfall at dark, and this trail has been made fresh since then."

"It is the track of the burner! Let us follow it, and punish the hand that held the torch!" cried an excitable young man, waving his gun above his head.

Bob and Sandy exchanged a quick glance; and the latter seemed to ask a question of his brother, since Bob quickly remarked:

"No, this does not prove that we were wrong; for Lacroix may have been in league with the Indians; and he could easily engage one of the red men to come here to do his work for him. It may be that the torch of a Pottawottomi or a Shawanee set fire to our cabin; but, Sandy, the hand of a Frenchman was back of it!"

With Reuben in the van, half a dozen of the men started following the fresh trail. They could have but little hope of coming upon the culprit, unless the Indian might have hidden near by, wishing to enjoy the confusion and

wild alarm his wanton act had caused; but, since they were so aroused, it might be just as well to scour the immediate neighborhood in order to give vent to some of their enthusiasm.

A few of the settlers had gone home. They could not tell what this midnight burning might signify. Perhaps other incendiaries abroad, and at any moment another fire would call for attention.

Every man was keyed up to a pitch where it would have gone hard with any Indian or halfbreed falling into his clutches just then. The entire settlement was astir. Women had armed themselves, not knowing but that a general attack might be forthcoming. And the wives and daughters of these early Ohio pioneers were well fitted to be the mates of the bold spirits that braved the unknown perils of the great wilderness. Many of them could handle a gun almost as well as the men.

The tracking party had now entered the dense woods. They had been warned by the older and more cautious members of the community to be careful lest they fall into some cunning ambush. That plain trail may have been left purposely in order to excite their anger, and bring them under the guns of concealed enemies, who would shoot them down without mercy.

This was Indian nature. Treachery went hand-in-hand with the war tactics of the red men. They thought it no wrong to lure their foes into a trap, and then slaughter them as wolves might be cut down. Pontiac himself had shown how exceedingly clever and crafty a warfare could be exercised against the white man.

At the important trading post of Michilimackinac hundreds of his Indians, mostly Sacs and Chippewas, had been loitering around the fort for days. On the king's birthday they had proceeded to celebrate by a great game of ball.

The sport had been carried on with all the customary noise and confusion; and the unsuspicious garrison allowed the players to rush within the stockade when the ball, seemingly by accident, was knocked over the high palisade.

Under their blankets many of the Indians carried muskets, with the barrels sawed off short; while all had their tomahawks and knives. At a given signal they fell upon the garrison, and, although a terrible fight ensued, the surprise was complete, so that a massacre had followed.

Nine other trading posts had fallen in much the same way, and the most important of all, Detroit, had a close call, when the sachem Pontiac laid siege with his allied tribes.

Although time had passed since these exciting days, the wily chieftain still lived to plot new schemes for the destruction of the encroaching whites. And never was his dreaded name mentioned in a weak border settlement without a shudder.

This was why the older men had warned the more hotheaded to be careful lest they run into an ambuscade; for it was a favorite trick among the Indians to lure rash settlers away from the shelter of their stockade by some such stratagem, and then fall upon them in overpowering numbers.

Clouds hid the moon from sight, but, only for dense foliage of the forest trees, the night would hardly be called dark. There were just seven in the band that pushed through the woods, following that trail. Old Reuben, at the head, held his blazing and smoking pine torch low, so that his eagle eyes might keep track of the imprint of those moccasins that toed-in. Behind him came the others, with guns ready for immediate use, and eyes trying to pierce

the gloom that loomed up ahead like a black wall.

No doubt after a time, when they had cooled down somewhat, a more sensible view of the situation would come over these eager trailers. Finding that the Indian had headed straight away from the settlement, they must realize the folly of trying to follow him further in the perilous night time, and retrace their steps back home.

Once they heard a crash, as some frightened wild animal floundered through the bushes ahead. It must have been a prowling bear, for no other creature would make so great a noise. Again their alert ears, that could pick up the faintest sounds, caught the snort of a deer that may have been viewing the advance of these strange fireflies through the woods until they came too near for comfort, and then fled swiftly with tremendous bounds.

Each time the men had gripped their guns, thinking that something was about to occur; but only once more to relax the nervous strain.

"I surely saw something move ahead, Bob!" exclaimed Sandy, who was alongside his brother in the forward movement.

- "Where?" asked the other, quickly; while the nearest neighbor cocked his head to listen, half raising his musket menacingly.
- "Over there where that tree hangs down across the way," replied Sandy, pointing with his gun.
- "Well, we must soon know whether it means anything," replied Bob, "for we are headed that way right now."
- "Look! look! it must be a man; and he is waving a white flag to us! He does not want us to fire upon him at sight!" cried Sandy, a few seconds later.
 - "Yes, you are right," declared his brother.

Of course the attention of all the members of the tracking party had now been attracted toward the moving object, which every one could see was a piece of white cloth being waved up and down. They changed their course just a little, and headed in a bunch for the spot.

"Be careful, lads!" said old Reuben. "No-body kin tell what the sly critters may be up to. Keep yer hands on yer triggers, but don't shoot till I give the word. Unless I'm mightily mistaken, that arm is an Injun's. Spread out a leetle, lads. He wants us to get closer still, afore he gives over wavin' that rag. Thar!

he's dropped the thing! Easy now, and wait! Ha!"

As the old woodranger gave vent to this last exclamation, the unseen party who had been signalling to them from behind the big oak, suddenly stepped into view, holding both hands above his head in token of amity.

Both Bob and Sandy uttered cries of astonishment.

"Why," cried the latter, "see Bob, it's our friend, Blue Jacket!"

CHAPTER X

BLUE JACKET'S WARNING

- "Sноот the cabin burner!"
- "He made the tracks we've been following!

 A rope would come in handy!"
- "The sneaking hound, to turn on the boys who saved his life! But it's only what we ought to expect from an Injun!"
- "He ought to be made meat for the crows, men!"

These angry exclamations arose from the group of settlers as they saw who was coming from behind the giant oak. Both Bob and Sandy, however, never for a moment dreamed of suspecting the young Indian brave of being concerned in the recent outrage.

They had found him seriously wounded at the time of the arrival of the emigrants on the Ohio. True, his hurts had doubtless been received during the preceding attack upon the camp of the pioneers, but the two boys did not let that influence them.

Something seemed to draw them to Blue

Jacket, and they had nursed him tenderly in the new cabin, until one night he had vanished. The older settlers, who did not believe that a true heart could beat under a red skin, were loud in their declaration that the boys had only nursed a snake that would come back to sting them.

But, when Sandy was captured and carried away to the Shawanee village, it was by the aid of Blue Jacket that his release was finally accomplished.

Since that day they had seen more or less of the young Indian. He occasionally turned up at the Armstrong cabin, to spend a few days with his white friends, of whom he seemed very fond; then he would vanish in a mysterious way without saying good-bye, to once more reappear, weeks later, always bringing in a deer, or a wild turkey, as a present for the sweet little mother who reigned as queen of the frontier cabin.

Sandy, more impetuous than his brother, though not any more fond of the young Indian, hearing these hasty and ugly remarks, immediately sprang forward, and, placed himself in front of Blue Jacket, spread out his arms as he exclaimed with a show of anger:

"Don't any one of you dare to lift a hand against him! He is our friend, tried and true! Why, sooner than try to burn our cabin, Blue Jacket would put his own hand in the fire and let it be consumed. I stand for him. The one who raises his hand against Blue Jacket will have to fight Sandy Armstrong!"

After that, of course, the guns that had been half-raised were allowed to drop once more; but the dark scowls did not leave the stern faces of those who gathered around.

"See here, Sandy, and you, too, Bob," said one of their comrades, as he shook his head gravely; "it may look all right to you; but there are some of us who fail to see anything good in Indians. We have followed the tracks of the redskin who tried to burn your father's cabin. It led us here. And, from behind a tree, comes this young brave. We believe he is the guilty one, and, unless he can prove his innocence, we think we have a right to punish him, even to the extent of taking his life!"

"You shall not harm a hair of his head!" cried Sandy. "I tell you it is impossible that he could have done so horrible a thing as try to burn our cabin. It may have been an Indian, as the tracks prove; but Blue Jacket, never!"

- "Listen," said the cooler Bob; "why should he wish to attract our attention if he had done this deed? All he had to do was to remain hidden behind that tree, and we would have passed by without seeing him."
- "But tell us why he came out holding his hands above his head; and for what reason should he wave the white rag?" demanded a fiery, half-grown fellow.
- "You would have done the same had you seen several men armed, and ready to shoot at a sound, passing through the woods with torches," replied Bob, soberly. "Blue Jacket was wise enough to understand that sometimes people shoot first, and ask questions afterward."

The young Indian had listened with an impassive face to what was being said. From childhood had he been trained to hide all signs of emotion as unbecoming to a warrior. While he did not fully understand the reason for this hot-tempered action on the part of the young whites, still, doubtless, he could draw certain conclusions.

"No burn cabin. Blue Jacket been way off in hills and think best see white father, Sandy, Bob. On way when see fire flash through trees. Hide so can know what mean — not want get hurt, so wave white flag. Ugh! Blue Jacket talk with straight tongue; no lie!"

He held up his right hand, and looked aloft through the branches of the trees, as though calling upon the Great Spirit to witness that what he so solemnly declared was true.

- "If he swears that he is innocent, let him prove it!" demanded the same young hothead who had before spoken.
- "Just as you say," returned Bob, who had the utmost confidence in his copper-colored friend. "Come, let us all go back to where those moccasin tracks are, which we have followed from our cabin. We will soon see if they were made by those Blue Jacket has on."
- "But that is foolish," remarked one of the others. "All moccasins are pretty much alike; and they make tracks that are as much the same as peas in a pod."
- "Is that so, Reuben?" asked Bob, appealing to the old and experienced woodsman, who knew Indians like a scholar would the pages of a printed book.
- "It air not," came the positive reply. "In the fust place, every tribe has its own way o' makin' footwear; and I kin tell at a look jest

which belongs ter a Shawanee, a Sac, a Pottawottomi, a Delaware or an Iroquois. Even among the Six Nations thar's much difference, a Seneca's being built different from the moccasin of a Mohawk or on Oneida."

- "I thought so," said Bob, smiling as though pleased. "And, Reuben, tell us if even Shawanee moccasins may not be known apart by some peculiar mark?"
- "A-plenty of times I've seen it. This one might have a patch at the toe; another show some mark whar the skin had been worn; or p'raps a crease straight acrost the foot," the old man replied, frankly.
- "And did you notice any such mark about the track we have been following—anything you would know again, no matter where you saw it?" Bob went on; for his own eyes had told him something far back, that had to do with this very thing.
- "Yes, thar war such a mark, Bob," returned the experienced woodsman. "Many times I saw it in the track. It looked like the Indian's moccasin kept comin' off, and he hed tied a piece of deerskin thong around his foot. Besides, it was bigger nor any footprint I've run acrost this many a day."

"Look down at the feet of Blue Jacket, Reuben; and here is one of the tracks we followed. Tell me, did the same foot make both prints?" and Bob, as he thus spoke, pointed at the ground where the young warrior stood.

The settler was already on his knees. He took a slender stick, and carefully measured the marked track of the moccasin. Then he applied the rule to the plainly seen imprint left by Blue Jacket as he voluntarily moved aside.

Every eye saw immediately that there were fully two inches difference between the length of the unknown cabin-burner's foot and that of Blue Jacket.

"I knew it!" cried Sandy, as he turned with flashing eyes toward the one who had demanded speedy justice on general principles. "You see how foolish you were, Abner; to want to do him harm without the least evidence against him, only that he is an Indian. Blue Jacket is a friend to the Armstrong family, even if there are others who do not like him."

The Indian stood with folded arms. He cast a quick glance of affection in the direction of Sandy when that impulsive individual spoke so warmly in his defence; but toward the others of the group he maintained a cold reserve. Like all of his kind he scorned to show what was in his heart, when the eyes of those who were unfriendly to him watched his every move.

- "Shall we go on?" asked old Reuben, looking dubious as he spoke.
- "It would be useless, I think," Bob observed.
 "We know by now that the man who put the torch to our cabin has fled. He can travel twice as swiftly through the forest as we could follow on his trail. Let him go. After all, no great harm has been done; and another time we may catch him at his work, if he comes back."
- "Besides," added Reuben, "we stand a chance of runnin' into ambush, if so be he has friends near by. If you ask me, I say return to the settlement."

Of course, after that, even the impetuous Abner could not venture a protest; and he certainly had no desire to continue the useless hunt alone, or with a single companion. Accordingly the party turned back, and threaded the dark forest aisles, heading in a direction that would bring them to the settlement.

Bob and Sandy kept Blue Jacket between them. They had also fallen back a little, so that they could talk undisturbed; for Bob had seen something in the manner of the Indian to convince him the other had sought the home of the Armstrongs with some important message.

"It has been long since Blue Jacket visited his white brothers," remarked Bob, who, when holding converse with the other, usually spoke after the manner of the Shawanees.

"Blue Jacket has been far away to the land of the rising sun, and the country of the big waters," replied the other, in his low musical voice. "Everywhere the war drum is sounding and the dance keeps up night after night. The great chief Pontiac has sent the wampum belt to all the tribes, and they thirst for blood. It may come with the new moon; it will not keep long. Blue Jacket is an Indian; but he loves his white brothers, Bob and Sandy. Long distance he come to tell them to be ready. Soon along border cabins go up in smoke, and many pale face squaws and papoose mourn for white braves who come not back. I have spoken!"

CHAPTER XI

TENDING THEIR TRAPS

The manner of Blue Jacket while saying this was grave. He had no liking for the whites, save the family of David Armstrong. His sympathies must be wholly bound up in the interests of his race. And yet, unable to rest easy when he knew these good friends would soon be in peril from another uprising of the allied tribes between the Great Lakes and the Ohio, he had come to give them warning.

Bob appreciated what a tremendous sacrifice this act must have been to the red brave, for, in bringing his terrible news, Blue Jacket was in part proving false to his teachings, and the interests of his tribe.

- "You must come home with us, and see our parents," Bob insisted, when he thought he saw an inclination on the part of the other to leave them.
- "Tell no more than that, Bob," remarked the young Indian. "All can say keep open eyes for bad times along Ohio. Big chief think now

can drive paleface settlers back other side mountains, never return. Many tribes send back wampum belt wrap up round tomahawk. Know that mean hatchet dug up; and ready to fight. Watch out, see storm, get in fort! Blue Jacket sorry, no can help."

When it was known that fresh word had come in connection with the dreaded uprising, the pioneers of the Ohio would find new cause for anxiety. But there had never been a time since their arrival that they had not been concerned about the hostile attitude of the Indians. Despite the protestations of some of the tribes as to their desire for peace, even to smoking the pipe with their white brothers, few believed that they meant it; and hence no man ever went far from his cabin without making sure to have his gun along, and that the priming was in the pan, ready for immediate use.

Mr. Armstrong was indeed glad to see Blue Jacket, for while at first he had distrusted him as an Indian, after the rescue of Sandy he could not doubt the loyalty of the young Shawanee.

In the morning he hoped to find out more particulars concerning the important news the newcomer brought, and which fully corroborated that which Pat O'Mara and Simon Kenton had carried, after their trips to the north.

But, when morning came, Blue Jacket could not be found. He had vanished again, after his usual way of leaving the cabin of his friends.

"Here is some Indian picture writing on this piece of white birch bark, that he left behind him," said Sandy, when he had looked everywhere without finding the dusky guest, who had slept on the hard floor by the fire, using for a bed only a bearskin thrown on the hard puncheon floor.

By this time the two boys had learned to read the sign language of the Indians to a fair extent. Blue Jacket himself had taken pains to teach them many things that had to do with his people, and their odd ways.

Consequently, between them Bob and Sandy started to figure out just what the various signs stood for. But this time the friendly young Shawanee had confined his efforts to one subject. Cabins and wigwams were given over to the flames, for the smoke curled up above each one. The various rude figures in sight they could understand to be Indian braves, carrying on the massacre, dancing around fires, and

waving objects in the air that must stand for scalps.

"It is only the same warning he gave us last night," said Bob. "He wants to make us believe that all this is coming, and we must keep on guard, day and night. But there was little need of that, because in Anthony Brady we have a leader who sleeps with one eye open. Whatever comes, this little Ohio River settlement will never be caught napping."

It was indeed a time that tried men's souls. And even pioneer boys felt the terrible responsibility resting on their young shoulders, for, as soon as a lad could aim and fire a gun, he became one of the defenders of the home, and must face danger bravely, or be branded as a coward by his kind.

- "When we go out hunting after this we must always be on the watch for sneaking enemies," said Sandy, with a tinge of disgust in his voice.
- "I only hope the scare will die out," ventured Bob, though his manner told that he did not have great faith in this direction.
- "Well, we must not pull too long faces about it," remarked Sandy; "because poor mother is dreadfully worried even now about what may

come to pass. We can't prevent it, do what we will, and there's no use crying till you're hurt."

From that time on a feeling of uneasiness rested over the little settlement. Men went about their daily tasks as usual; but many suspicious glances were cast upon the heavy forest beyond the clearing, as though they might be wondering how soon it would be before the shrill war cries of the painted foe burst from those gloomy depths, and blazing cabins told that the worst had come to pass.

And the women stuck closer than ever to their homes, while children were never allowed to stray away, as had been their habit during the earlier summer. Around the humble tables, when the supper was spread, the talk was chiefly concerning such shreds of news as floated in to them from other settlements.

As yet, so far as they could learn, no concerted outbreak had occurred, although, further south and west, the Shawanees were, as usual, harassing the settlements founded by Daniel Boone. But these valiant pioneers of Kentucky were so quick on the trigger, and so ready to match their cunning against that of the red foe, that the Indians had not made any great progress toward wiping out the hardy invaders.

The lateness of the season caused some of the more hopeful to believe that the contemplated uprising might be delayed until spring, since winter was seldom a time for Indian warfare.

As they already had every trap they possessed in use, Bob and Sandy knew that it was necessary for them to visit the entire line daily, unless they wished to lose what fur had been taken over night. These traps had not been set any great distance from the settlement, for they had found plenty of traces of mink, marten, otter, badger and fox in the ravines and creeks within a couple of miles of home; and while, at one time, they had contemplated going further away, the uneasiness of their mother influenced them to make a shorter circuit.

Accordingly they started every other day to visit these traps. Sandy had also discovered a colony of beaver up a lonely stream, and, as he coveted their glossy pelts, he had made sure to leave several of his best traps hidden just under the surface of the water with the bait, scented with castor, above, so that, when one of the little animals tried to reach up, it would surely step into the open jaws of the trap, and be drowned.

One thing the boys had faithfully promised their parents. This was to always keep close together when out in the forest, either in search of fresh meat or visiting their traps to remove the captured fur-bearers.

Bob was particularly interested in every sort of information which he could secure concerning the Indians of this Northwest Territory. He knew the chief differences between the many tribes, and that, while all the rest were in favor of the wily French traders, most of the Iroquois or Six Nations inclined toward the English.

But this did not mean that they would be friendly toward the settlers beyond Fort Duquesne, later known as Fort Pitt; for already were the strong signs of rebellion rife in the Colonies; and the Indians began to take the side of the loyalists against the Americans.

Often, while he and Sandy were making the rounds of their traps, Bob would relate something of interest that he had managed to pick up; and his brother, though not as deeply concerned as himself, always asked numerous questions.

Some days passed after the visit of Blue Jacket, and thus far nothing had come about

that might excite new alarm. Almost daily some scout or courier belonging in the settlement would come in with news; but the reports all seemed to point to a possibility of the outbreak being postponed, for a while at least. Pontiac had not had sufficient time in which to mature his terrible scheme; because it was so difficult to get answers from distant tribes, in the confederacy of treachery.

Things were drifting on in this fairly satisfactory way when there came a sudden break in the calm, so far as the Armstrong family was concerned.

As usual, the two boys had been out on their line of traps, and were returning home late in the afternoon. They had been unusually successful, which accounted for their tardiness, for as a rule they were home long before this.

Sandy had succeeded in shooting a deer, and bore a bountiful supply of fresh meat on his broad shoulders. Bob, on the other hand, staggered under a goodly bunch of pelts, consisting of two beaver, a beautiful black fox, three mink, and some muskrat skins that were not worth anything at the time in the market, but were used by the settlers for making warm mitts for winter wear, or snug caps calculated to

keep their ears from freezing when the cold winds howled, and the snow fell.

The boys had just come in sight of their cabin when Sandy saw something that caused him to call to his brother.

"Look, Bob, what do you suppose all those people are doing around our home? I can count five, six, seven women standing, talking; and there's Mr. Brewster and Mr. Lane coming out of the cabin. Oh! I wonder if that firebrand has been about again, trying to burn us out?"

And Bob, looking hastily, was also thrilled to see that his brother spoke the truth, in so far as the gathering of neighbors was concerned. He too became immediately deeply concerned, and his boyish face lost every particle of color.

- "No, it couldn't be that, Sandy," he said, in a voice that trembled with new-born anxiety; "but I fear it may be father has hurt himself again. Ever since that tree fell on him, and nearly took his life, he has been hardly himself."
- "But you must surely be wrong, Bob," spoke up the other, eagerly; "for see, there is father coming out of the door now, and shaking hands

with Mr. Lane. If there is any one ill it must be our darling mother, because I can see sister Kate with the women right now."

"But no, that cannot be either, Sandy," said Bob, as he stared at the group near the cabin. "If our mother were ill you do not believe that both father and Kate would leave her alone, while they gossiped with the neighbors outside the doors? It must mean something else! See, Kate is dancing about as though she could not quite contain herself. Now she looks this way, and I believe she sees us."

"Which is quite true," Sandy observed, still trembling from excitement, "because the little witch is running straight toward us as fast as her dear feet will carry her. Listen, she is calling something too; but for the life of me I can't quite make out what she says."

"Anyhow, Sandy," Bob said, smilingly, we need not fear that it can be very terrible, or Kate would not be looking so gay. See her wave her hands to us as she dances along! Come, why longer hang back, when by meeting her half-way we shall the sooner learn just what has happened to bring the neighbors to our home."

[&]quot;Just as you say, Bob. I was afraid at first,

thinking that something had gone wrong with our loved ones; but—why, there is mother right now, joining the rest at the door. Look, they seem to be saluting her, as though there might be some cause for congratulations. Bob, I no longer fear that trouble has visited us; but, if I am shaking, it is with eagerness to know what it all means."

Kate had ceased trying to make them understand; but all the time she was rapidly approaching the heavily laden boy trappers.

Almost out of breath she came up finally, to throw her arms about the neck of one brother, and then affectionately embrace the other.

- "Come, what ails you, Kate?" demanded Bob, when the girl had repeated this demonstration twice, as though unable to articulate, owing to her excitement and loss of breath through running.
- "Good news!" she managed to say, beaming at them in turn.
- "Something's happened then," cried Sandy;
 "something good, you say? Bob, can you make
 her stop dancing around like that, and speak?
 I'm feeling like I was in a dream, and just can't
 for the life of me understand what could happen out here so far away from everywhere."

Bob caught his sister, and, having dropped his burden, threw an arm around her.

- "Now, tell us at once," he said, in his commanding way; "was it a letter?"
- "Yes, yes!" she answered, with a happy gasp, and merry eyes that seemed suspiciously moist with tears of very joy. "A letter from the lawyer in Richmond, telling father that at last, after these years of waiting, the great case has been decided, and in his favor. He is to come and receive the money of which his wicked cousin robbed him ever so long ago. Is it not splendid news, brothers?"

CHAPTER XII

THE CRUEL PARTING

- "OH! I'm so glad for mother's sake!" exclaimed Bob, his first thought being of that beloved, patient little woman, who had stood shoulder to shoulder with her husband through all the hard times of the past.
- "Yes, now she can have some of the things other women own," said Sandy, gleefully; "for father will have to go to Richmond, and can bring back with him many comforts that we never expected to get here."
- "If only he does not have to cross the big water!" sighed Kate, proving that there was a fly in the ointment, after all, and that this possibility loomed up mountain high even in the midst of her joy.

Crossing the ocean in those days was a tremendous undertaking, with the sailing craft subject to all whims of the fickle weather for many weeks; and few contemplated such a voyage lightly.

"But father often said that if this long post-

poned case was decided in his favor he would only have to go to Richmond to be put in possession of his own!" remarked Bob. "So I wouldn't worry about it, Kate, dear. us go on to the cabin, for I can see mother looking this way, and beckoning."

They found a happy group when they reached the log building. The neighbors had come to rejoice with the Armstrongs over the glorious news; for only too well did every housewife know the privations that had followed the loss of Mr. Armstrong's little fortune; and how delightful it was to realize that things were now about to take a decided turn for the better.

Others came flocking to the scene, and that night was one never to be forgotten. Such good news as this seldom came to any of the pioneers. As a rule those hardy men had to build their own fortunes by daily contact with the rough edges of life, clearing first one acre of land, and planting it to crops; and then slowly adding to their holdings, year by year.

Mr. Armstrong knew that it was absolutely necessary that he proceed east at the very earliest day in order to get back before winter had settled in earnest over the mountains, since they would be utterly impassable once this occurred. He consulted with some of his best friends; for since they had been neighbors many months now they had come to know each other fully.

His wife was both happy and oppressed. She knew that her little family would be rendered better able to withstand the hardships of pioneer life after David had been to the east, and returned, bringing the many things so needed to make them comfortable; but the thought of the separation gave her much pain, since the pair were very devoted to each other.

But it was considerable pleasure to be able to make out a long list of things which the good man was to secure, after he had come into his own. Several pack animals would be needed on which to transport all he expected to bring to the Ohio. The neighbors, almost to a family, thought of various little things they needed; and Mr. Armstrong was commissioned to purchase these.

"Why," he laughed, as another day had passed, with his list growing to a formidable length, as still more of the settlers' wives came, with money and a request that he buy them this article or that; "if this keeps on I'll surely have a regular caravan under my charge, as numerous as the one with which we first crossed

the mountains, and found this beautiful spot on the Ohio."

"But, father," said far-seeing Bob, "that will be all the better, for it has been some time since there was a pack train out of Virginia headed this way, and I am sure quite a lot of people will want to join you. They have been hearing stories about this golden west a long time now; and we know what that means."

"Yes," observed the good wife, as she looked up into the bronzed face of the pioneer; "and if the company is large, the better I shall be pleased, David, because it will mean that you are safe. Bring them along, all who yearn to come hither. We will stand by them — the men to help build cabins before the winter sets in; the women to assist in fitting their homes up, so as to give the newcomers a start. There is room in plenty here in this glorious country, where people can really breathe without paying taxes to a king three thousand miles away."

That evening the neighbors flocked to the Armstrong cabin to spend a few hours with those for whom they had come to feel so much respect and affection. If some of them secretly envied the Armstrongs their great good fortune, they managed to conceal the fact, for

every one seemed bubbling over with happiness.

On the morrow the start was to be made. All preparations had been completed looking forward to the event. It happened, fortunately, that several parties were expecting to leave for the fields of Virginia about this time; and, since greater safety would follow if they went together, they had managed to set upon this day, close upon the verge of fall, for a start.

Often during the evening Bob caught his father's eyes fastened upon himself and Sandy. He knew well what thoughts must be passing through the mind of the pioneer. And again and again did Bob promise himself that he would strive to do everything in his power to fill that father's place while the head of the family was absent.

There was really little sleep under that humble roof that night. First, the excitement attaching to the visit of so many neighbors broke into the routine of their daily life. Then, after these good friends had departed, it was found that a number of things had been neglected that were absolutely necessary for the comfort of the traveller.

The party anticipated making an early start

in the morning, so none of these could be postponed. Besides, it was only natural that every member of the family should be worked up to a high degree of nervous anxiety, and lie awake long after they had sought their cots, thinking of a thousand and one matters.

Early indeed were they astir. Breakfast was prepared as usual; but, on this morning, no one had much heart for merriment. Mrs. Armstrong indeed kept a smile on her face, but it was forced simply to encourage her husband; since she knew only too well how he must feel at the idea of thus separating himself from all he held dear on earth.

Bob, Sandy and Kate tried their best to appear natural, but it was indeed hard work. Often Kate would make some excuse for darting out of the room, and, when she came back a little later, there was always a suspicious redness about her eyes that told plainly how she had indulged in a cry to ease the numb pain in her girlish heart. And even fun-loving Sandy dared not take her to task, for he was on the verge of a breakdown himself.

Mr. Armstrong, seeing how his wife exerted herself to sustain him, and ashamed to let her bear the whole burden, made a great effort, and mastered his feelings. He took Bob aside as they left the table, and with a hand on the shoulder of his oldest boy said:

"Be very careful, son, while I am away. Your mother will have no one but you to stand by her, for Sandy, though a well-meaning lad, is hardly to be depended on in times of stress. Be vigilant and watchful. Remember that we have to deal with a cunning and merciless foe, and, should there be an attack on the settlement, see to it that your mother is quickly taken inside the stockade. I depend much on you, Robert; and, if it were not so, nothing could induce me to leave home with these ugly rumors of trouble floating to our ears. You promise me to do everything a man could for your sister's and your mother's well-being?"

And Bob, looking firmly into the face of his father, managed to say in reply:

"I promise to try and fill your place, father, as best I may. But oh! we will count the days till your return. If Pat O'Mara comes in while you are away, perhaps he may agree to stay with us. Try and think all is going well. Sandy and I have many plans ahead; but we will stick as close to our home as may be. Do not fear for us. And, just to think, how happy we will

all be when we see you come home again, bringing so many things to make our dearest mother happy."

That was all. These two understood one another, so that many words were not necessary. Bob had always been a serious lad, and right well did his father know that in trusting him he was not putting his faith in jeopardy.

Apparently the entire settlement had gathered to witness the departure, as well as wish the travellers Godspeed on their way.

Even little Kate brightened up with all this clamor around her, and smiled; though, after the parting had taken place, she would doubtless sob her heart out on her mother's breast.

Dogs barked, men called, horses neighed, and women chattered. It had indeed been a long time since the new settlement on the river had witnessed such excitement. Each of the men had a horse upon which he expected to make the long mountain trip. Two of them did not intend to return again to the Ohio; but the third man had business at the coast, and was taking advantage of this favorable opportunity to make the double trip in good company.

And then, finally, came the moment when, for the last time, David Armstrong took his wife and children into his strong arms, to give them a hug and a farewell kiss.

Tears fell in showers from the blue eyes of Kate; and even many of the women could not refrain from weeping, affected by the scene; but, through it all, gentle Mrs. Armstrong maintained her sweet and encouraging smile, and she looked into the troubled face of her husband, as she put him from her, with the same brave expression.

But Bob knew only too well how hard it was for her to keep up, and that, once she could be free from all those curious eyes, the wells of her sorely-stricken heart would burst out in silent weeping. But no mortal eyes would witness her sorrow, nor would any of her dear ones be discouraged by seeing her give way.

Now the four men had mounted. Tied to their saddles were numerous packages containing things intended for their comfort on the long and arduous trip. Each carried a blanket wrapped in a roll, and, of course, a gun, with plenty of powder in the horn, as well as bullets in the pouch that hung suspended from their shoulders, as was the custom.

One last look at his little family, and then, as the word was given, David Armstrong dug his heels into the sides of his horse, to follow after his comrades of the trail.

A cheer burst forth from the assembled settlers. Then some one started a hymn, one of those old-time tunes which had ever been a source of comfort to the pioneer families when peril threatened. Every person, old and young, chimed in; and, high above all the rest, the sweet voice of Mary Armstrong was carried to the ears of the departing adventurers.

Once Mr. Armstrong turned in the saddle. This was just before a twist in the trail would hide him from the view of those whom he had left behind. Raising his hat he waved it in the air once, twice, thrice. Then the trees swallowed the figures of horse and rider from view. He was gone!

Bob heaved a long sigh, but valiantly repressed the tears that tried to dim his sight. He felt that he must more than ever show himself a man, now that his father depended so on him to look after his little flock during his absence; and it was surely not manly to cry.

Sandy had no such compunctions, however, though he managed to hide his own emotion in trying to comfort poor little Kate.

The bitterness would soon wear away with

these younger members of the family, for they had the abounding spirits of youth and good health to carry them through; but many times would that good wife sit by herself, engaged in her duties, and tears dim her eyes as her thoughts went out to the absent husband and father.

Well did she know the nature of the deadly perils that beset that path back to the fertile fields of Virginia; how wild beasts lurked in thicket and forest, ready to spring upon unsuspecting travellers; and still more savage Indians laid ambuscades and traps, in which to catch their hated paleface foes.

In a day or two things had settled down again at the Armstrong cabin. Bob and Sandy took up their duties manfully. The mother might well feel proud of having two such boys upon whom to lean in her necessity. They were determined to keep the family larder plentifully supplied with fresh meat; and at the same time increase the store of pelts that sooner or later would prove so fine a harvest, when they could get them to a market.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRAND HUNT

WITH a winter approaching, the severity of which none of them could more than guess at, it was the most natural thing in the world for the Ohio river settlers to wish to lay in a goodly stock of dried venison and buffalo meat.

From the friendly Indians they had learned just how this "pemmican" was prepared; and, while it could not be compared to fresh meat, still, to tide over a protracted season, when possibly game could not be had, it promised to prove valuable indeed.

Already in every cabin could be seen long strips hanging from the rafters of the living-room, or drying before the fire when rainy weather prevented its being cured in the hot sunshine.

Still, the meagre quantity in hand was a source of considerable anxiety to the serious-minded men of the settlement. Should the Indians come in sufficient force to harass them to any great extent, their hunting might be

stopped. Hence, only a day or two after the departure of Mr. Armstrong and his three companions, a general hunt was proposed.

Of course it was not intended that all the defenders of the settlement should be away at the same time. They were formed into two companies, one of which would be out for a couple of days; and, upon reaching home laden with spoils, the second detachment might try their luck.

In this round-up it was hoped to secure so large a supply of game that the housewives would be able to put away all the permican they wanted.

Of course Bob and Sandy were heart and soul in the proposed grand hunt. They had already brought in enough meat to enable Kate and the mother to store away a vast quantity for winter use; but, being good providers, the boys hardly knew when to stop. Besides, both of them loved the chase, since the spirit of the true sportsman flowed with the blood through their veins.

And so it chanced that they accompanied the second party that went forth. It was policy for these hunters to seek new fields for their raid on the storehouse of Nature, since their

comrades must have sadly depleted the number of deer and buffaloes toward the east. Accordingly they had turned in the direction of the setting sun.

The Armstrong boys had possibly done more tramping within ten miles of the settlement than any other white person. Most of their time had been spent in the forest, with gun or trap in hand. Thus they knew the best places for game, and were able to post the balance of their party when they sallied forth that day.

As was always their custom, the boys had kissed both their mother and sister good-bye when starting forth on the hunt, little suspecting what strange vicissitudes of fortune were fated to come upon them ere they four met again.

Of course it was not the intention of Bob and Sandy to remain away from their humble cabin home over night. Had they dreamed of so doing they would have seen to it that the defenceless ones were safely lodged at the blockhouse within the strong stockade in the centre of the settlement; just as Bob had promised his father should be done in case of an Indian attack.

A scout had come in the day before, bringing

news that things seemed to be going on about as before. The Indians were indulging in the war dance it was true, and nightly the harsh sound of the war drum might be heard pealing through forest and over plain; but they seemed to be holding back for some final word from that mighty plotter and enemy of the whites, the war-chief of the Great Lakes, Pontiac.

As this would be really the last big hunt, and danger did not seem to be imminent, the boys had no serious fears as they went forth. It gave them so much pleasure to know that they were filling the shoes of the absent father, and providing food for the winter that was drawing nearer every passing day, that they departed in high spirits, throwing back kisses to the two who stood at the door of the cabin, watching their going.

By noon they were miles away from the cabin in the clearing, and intent on the business that had tempted them to the forest. The various members of the party had arranged a central rendezvous where they were expected to meet after they had secured their supply of fresh meat. There were eight in all, making just four couples, for it was deemed wise that they should not separate entirely.

The vast woods that surrounded them on all sides might hide other living things besides the four-footed game which they expected to surprise and secure. For unknown centuries had the red men followed the tortuous buffalo trails in their annual hunts, and frequent spells of warfare between rival tribes. They looked upon the invasion of the palefaces with increasing concern, as meaning the gradual absorption of this fair country; and, as time rolled on, their efforts to stem the tide of emigration by massacre and the torch would become more frantic.

At noon the boys had not succeeded in securing their quota of game. They had purposely given their companions the most desirable locations, feeling certain that in good season they would be able to accomplish all they wished, for Sandy had ever been a lucky hunter.

"Come," said Bob, as they sat side by side on a log to enjoy the "snack" Kate had put up for each of her brothers; "we must do better than this, Sandy, unless we want to have them laugh at us. From now on we ought to stir ourselves, and get either a fat deer or a buffalo."

"I hope it is a cow then, and not a tough old bull," remarked Sandy, who was munching on his hoe cake and cold turkey, the last of a fine gobbler his ready musket had fetched down some days back.

- "Well, that depends pretty much on you," laughed Bob. "If you have any choice be sure to pick out a yearling, and leave the old chaps alone."
- "Yes," grumbled the other, shaking his head as he spoke; "that's all very nice, Bob; but you know that sometimes the old bull refuses to be let alone."
- "Now you're thinking of that time you were treed by a buffalo you had wounded, and kept up in the branches for hours. Only for that bright thought that came to you, and which led you to fish for your gun with some yarn secured from unravelling your stocking, you might have stayed there all night."
- "But I didn't, you remember, Bob!" grinned Sandy, looking up archly. "The doubled yarn held first-rate, and brought me my gun. After that it was easy to send a bullet back of the bull's shoulder; and I even had the pleasure of toting some of his carcass home; but mother said it was only good for soup, it was so tough."
 - "Well," remarked Bob, rising to his feet,

and picking up his gun, "I'm ready to make a fresh start, if you say so. And here's hoping that we have better luck than the morning brought us."

"I wonder how far he is on his way now?" sighed Sandy.

They had not been speaking of Mr. Armstrong at all; but Bob could understand readily enough whom his brother meant, for was not that beloved father in their minds pretty much all the time?

"Oh! he can hardly be a great way off," Bob made answer. "You know how slow they must travel when crossing the mountains. Still, they have no women and children along to hold them back. However, weeks must pass before we can hope to see him again. Why, it will be almost in the winter I fear, though mother refuses to say as much."

Sandy gulped something down as he strode after his brother. He could not control his feelings as well as the stronger Bob, and the thought of that father perhaps never coming home again always unmanned him.

Presently, however, in the excitement of the hunt, he managed to forget his anxieties; for Sandy dearly loved the chase, and everything

connected with the great forest appealed to his nature:

An hour later they chanced upon the track of a small herd of buffaloes.

"It is fresh, too," declared Sandy, after he had dropped down on hands and knees to examine the marks of split hoofs.

"Then here is our meat, if we are lucky enough to get within shooting distance," declared Bob, looking carefully to the priming of his flintlock musket, as was the universal habit with the pioneers of the days of Boone, since a lack of powder at that point, when the hammer came down, and sparks flew into the pan, would cause a misfire, and that generally meant trouble.

Carefully the brothers crept along, first one and then the other taking the lead, in order not to miss the tracks of the game. They could only hope that the buffalo might have stopped near by, to lie down during the heat of the day, or lick the salt at one of the known spots frequented by such animals.

"Hist!" whispered Sandy, presently, as he slowly allowed his body to sink down until he was hidden behind the brush that acted as a screen beyond.

No words were permissible under such conditions. The wary game was too close by for talking, even in whispers. Sandy pointed, and made a few gestures that his companion must have readily understood, for he immediately nodded. They had hunted so often in company that they had a regular code of signals for occasions like this, to take the place of verbal communications.

Thus Bob understood that the buffaloes were within easy gunshot, that several of them were even then in sight, and appeared to be feeding; and the opportunity for a double shot excellent.

Together they crept forward through the brush, inch by inch. Arrived at the further side they found that they could see splendidly. Bob bent his head close to Sandy's ear, and whispered softly:

"You take the mother; leave me the half-grown baby!"

A minute later the reports boomed out, starting several other animals up from the long grass of the glade where they had been lying. The young pioneers were gratified to see both buffaloes fall as though mortally wounded; for the boys were good shots, and seldom missed bringing down their quarry.

Still they knew better than to dash recklessly out in the open, so long as that grand old bull with the wicked-looking black horns ran bellowing about, snorting in his mad desire to do battle with the unseen foe that had brought confusion into his family.

Presently he, too, galloped after the other buffaloes. Then the boys dared stand up, and proceeded to reload their guns; after which they walked over to their game, with the intention of securing all they could carry of the choice portions.

An hour later they were headed for the spot agreed on as a general meeting-place for the various couples engaged in the hunt. Each of them was loaded down with meat, enclosed in the hides of the animals that had fallen to their guns.

"I hope the others have come in," remarked Bob as they drew near the spring that bubbled out from under the roots of a giant oak, and, being located on a little rise, was a prominent object for some distance around. "We ought to be starting homeward soon, you know."

"Yes," replied Sandy, "this load is going to fret my shoulders some, I fear, before I get

rid of it. But it seems to me we ought to sight the oak spring about now, Bob!"

"And there it is," remarked his brother, as they suddenly came out of the dense brush into

more open ground.

"Why they're all back but us, it seems," remarked Sandy. "Four, six—why, Bob, look, there's another one along now, seven, I count! Perhaps a messenger from the settlement! I hope it doesn't mean bad news. See, they're beckoning to us! Oh! hurry, Bob, hurry! What if it should be for us—what if—"

"There, that will do, Sandy; don't be silly enough to think up every awful happening before you know;" but, while Bob spoke thus bravely, his own heart was throbbing much faster than usual as he hastened his footsteps, and thus approached the spot where the seven men awaited them.

He noted the furtive looks on their faces, and understood that it was sympathy for himself and Sandy that caused the lowered eyes, the clinched hands, and the tightly compressed teeth.

"What brings you out here, Mr. Harkness?"
Bob asked, trying to steady his voice, though

with poor success. "Surely no one is sick at home — our mother, Kate!"

Sandy gave a groan as he saw the settler nod his head in the affirmative when their sister's name was mentioned.

"Yes, Bob," Mr. Harkness said, with an intake of his breath; "it is Kate! Steady now, my poor boys, and be brave! She has been carried off by a prowling band of Indians!"

CHAPTER XIV

BLACK BEAVER STRIKES

"OH! it must be a terrible mistake; you can't mean it, Mr. Harkness!" cried Sandy, white of face, and trembling like a leaf.

Bob, however, understood. He knew the settler would never have sought them out simply to carry an idle rumor. And probably, in that moment of acute pain, the young pioneer once again saw those beady black eyes of the Seneca chief, Black Beaver, as they fastened greedily upon the pretty face of little Kate. He, too, was thrilled with horror when he heard those terrible words; but, fortunately, he could control himself much better than his younger brother.

- "Tell us, Mr. Harkness; is Kate lost; and do they only believe she has been carried off, or is it proved?" he asked, his voice hoarse with suffering.
- "I am afraid it is but too true, my lad," replied the settler, as he laid his hand on the shoulder of the Armstrong boy.

- "Did any one see it done?" continued Bob, between his set teeth; for he could not believe that any neighbor would have stood idly by, and witnessed such an abduction, without doing everything in his power to thwart the evil designs of the prowling red men.
- "No. Kate went to the spring for water. Her mother thought once she heard a little cry, and was worried; but, stepping out of doors, she looked that way, and believed she saw Kate's shawl moving among the trees, as though she were stooping down to pick some late wild flower. Reassured, she returned to her work indoors. An hour passed. Then, suddenly she remembered the circumstance and, alarmed, she hurried to the spring."
- "And Kate had disappeared?" exclaimed Bob, in dismay.
- "Yes," replied the man. "Your mother called aloud again and again, her alarm increasing each moment as no answer came. Wildly she ran across to the cabin of Mr. Brewster, which was the nearest of all the neighbors. He happened to be at home, and, seizing his gun, immediately hurried to aid her, meanwhile sending his boy to sound the alarm."

- "Yes, yes, and when they arrived what did they learn?" demanded Sandy.
- "They had hardly reached the cabin when who should appear from the woods but your old friend, Pat O'Mara, returned unexpectedly from his last scout."

Both Bob and his brother gave utterance to a cry of joy when the settler uttered these words.

- "How fortunate we are to have him with us now!" exclaimed Bob.
- "So we all thought," went on Mr. Harkness.
 "When he had learned what was the trouble,
 O'Mara immediately made us all keep back until he could closely examine the vicinity of the
 spring."
- "He was looking for the tracks of the kidnappers," remarked one of the hunters.
- "Truly, it was a fortunate thing that so clever a trailer should have come into the settlement just when his services were so desperately needed," said another, who knew the Irish trapper's worth.
- "O'Mara quickly found the imprint of many moccasins," resumed the settler. "He could tell just how Kate had been suddenly seized by an Indian, who crept up behind while she was

stooping beside the spring. Her bucket was found in the bushes, just where the cunning rascals had hidden it, so as to make her mother think she had wandered away in search of butterflies, or to visit some favorite nook where she might be watching a late brood of young quail."

- "But you said that, after the cry, our mother saw Kate moving about?" Bob ventured to remark, in puzzled tones.
- "That was only another of the crafty schemes of the redskins," replied Mr. Harkness. "O'Mara showed us how one of her captors must have taken her shawl, and, throwing it over his head, showed just enough of himself to deceive the mother. They were evidently afraid lest her one cry might have been heard."
- "Please finish," burst out the fretting Sandy; "for I am just wild to rush away home, so as to take up the trail. Is Pat O'Mara waiting for us to come in, so that we may all start out together?"
- "Not so," came the quick response. "As soon as he found out positively what had come to pass, the trapper vowed he would himself pursue the fleeing Indians, and bring back the child of his friend, David Armstrong."

- "God bless him!" murmured Bob, strangely moved by this evidence of the woodranger's devotion.
- "Tired as he was with half a day's tramp," the settler went on, "and hardly waiting to replenish his stock of powder and ball, as well as to secure an extra flint and steel for his tinder bag, Pat O'Mara rushed away, following the trail."
 - "Alone?" gasped Sandy.
- "It could not be otherwise," replied the other, sadly. "Here were eight of the defenders of the settlement away on a hunt. One man must be sent out to carry you the terrible news, as well as urge a hasty return. Since we thus knew that hostiles were apparently on the warpath, we dared not weaken our fighting force further, much as we felt for your good mother."
- "Then let us hasten home without any further delay," said Bob, firmly, while the light of a great resolution shone in his brave eyes. "Take courage, Sandy; all is not lost! We can follow the wicked thieves; and already our friend Pat O'Mara is hot on the trail! How many of the Indians were there, did he say, Mr. Harkness?"

"I think four in all, counting the one who seized your sister," came the reply.

The eyes of the two boys sought each other's face; it was as though the same thought had instantly flashed into both minds.

"The young Seneca chief, Black Beaver!" exclaimed Sandy.

"He had three companions with him," Bob went on; "and, instead of continuing on to his far distant village, which he declared was away up on the shore of the Great Lakes, the treacherous dog has hovered about the settlement ever since that day, waiting for a favorable chance to come when he could steal our little sister away. That time came when he saw us depart with the rest on this big hunt!"

It was quickly arranged that Bob and Sandy should hasten on ahead in the company of the settler. Some of the others promised to bring in their share of the fresh buffalo meat.

Forgotten was their fatigue. Love for the sweet little sister, who had been a ray of sunlight in that frontier cabin, urged the boys on, so that they put the hardy settler to his best efforts to keep abreast of them.

And, before the afternoon was far spent, they drew near the cabin in the big clearing, where

the resolute arms of David Armstrong and his two sons had built so comfortable a home.

It was now a scene of tremendous commotion. Men and women could be seen moving around, looking toward the woods, and shielding their eyes from the fierce sun's rays, while they watched for the coming of the eager brothers of the little maid who had been so strangely abducted by a savage and treacherous enemy.

Bob remembered the other occasion when, on arriving home, they had found neighbors gathered about their cabin; but how different the conditions were! On that day it had been to rejoice with the Armstrongs that the settlers and their wives had gathered; now it was to mourn, to comfort, to advise.

Mrs. Armstrong was prostrated by the dreadful calamity that had befallen her; for, to have her sweet child thus taken away, never again perhaps to be folded in her motherly arms, was a blow that caused her heart to sink with dread.

It seemed all the worse because the father was away, heading toward the rising sun, and himself exposed to constant danger from the foes that lurked in the dark recesses of the forest.

But, when her two brave boys had taken her

in their embrace, and assured her that they would never rest until Kate were brought back, the poor mother took fresh courage. She knew that there was still a hope, faint though it might be.

The boys were filled with zeal. They knew that an expedition lay before them such as must dwarf all others in which they had engaged. Even experienced forest rangers might well pause before attempting to pierce that hostile country, where not a friendly white might be met, those they were apt to run across being the trouble-making French trappers and traders, who had come down from Canada in the hope and expectation of arousing the combined tribes against the English-speaking settlers, so that the entire country might be reserved for themselves, from the Great Lakes down to the town on the Gulf, near the mouth of the Mississippi River.

Many hands assisted them in making speedy preparations, for every one was deeply interested in their mission. Few expected to ever see the brave brothers again, although all such gloomy beliefs were kept in the background, so that they might not add to the woes of the poor mother.

This one brought a supply of bullets; another filled the capacious horns with the necessary powder, without which the adventurers would be next to helpless, once they were far away from the outposts of civilization. Still a third looked after a stock of pemmican, which was to sustain them as they pushed ever onward into the unexplored depths of that vast wilderness, teeming with dangers.

Sandy could think of nothing, he was so eager to be on the move; but Bob, besides comforting his mother, made sure that they had plenty of tinder; that an extra pair of moccasins was fastened to each belt, since they knew not when those they wore might give way under the long tramp; and also that both knives were in a condition of sharpness to give a good account of themselves.

All these things were done in a comparatively short time. The sun was still two hours high when they announced themselves as ready to start on their perilous journey into the unknown.

Mr. Brewster had assured them that their mother should be taken into his family, and guarded well during their absence. This kind-

ness gave Bob new courage, for he felt that he could put out of his mind all anxieties concerning their home, and devote himself entirely to the rescue of Kate.

Several of the men announced that they intended accompanying the young pioneers a short distance on their way, to give them encouragement and a good send-off. Nor were the two lads averse to such a proceeding, as it served to soften the painful parting with their mother.

The trail was taken up at the spring. No particular effort had been made by the Indians to hide their tracks, and it was little trouble for such keen-eyed trackers as Bob and Sandy to follow the plain marks.

The dusky raiders had been careful, apparently, to avoid being seen by any of the settlers as they hurried away, after securing the white girl. Since no trace of Kate's little moccasins could be found, Bob knew that she must have been carried.

More than once he stooped low to examine the imprint in the clay of the leading Indian's elkskin footwear. It was his purpose to know any peculiarity that attached to those moccasins, so that he might recognize them again at any future time among a dozen similar tracks.

A circuit was made so as to pass fully around and below the settlement. Then gradually the trail began to near the border of the great river. Bob knew what this signified. Of course the Iroquois must have had a canoe hidden somewhere, in which they had crossed the stream.

One of the men was immediately sent back to secure such a boat, and hasten down the stream, so that it might be available should the boys seek to pass over to the opposite shore. Half an hour later the little company stood on the bank, waiting for the canoe to reach them, having signalled to the paddler as agreed upon.

Plain marks could be seen where a canoe had been carried from the bushes and launched, afterward being entered by the red men. There was something more awaiting them here on the bank of the beautiful river. A stick held a scrap of paper, on which were a few lines of crabbed writing. It was a message from Pat O'Mara; and, though the Irish trapper talked rather uncouthly, he could at least frame his thoughts in fairly decent English.

This then was what he had written:

"Indians crossed river here in canoe. Will follow, and, when find where landed, leave piece of red cloth in stick. Look for it close to water's edge."

That was all, but it signified much to the eager boys, who were only waiting for the coming of the dugout to themselves push across the river. Trust to their keen eyes to discover that tiny bit of flaming cloth!

"But where could he have found a boat?" asked Sandy, looking surprised, as this puzzle presented itself before him.

Bob shook his head. He knew the daring nature of O'Mara too well to believe that the other would halt in his pursuit simply because he wanted a canoe.

"A log upon which he could fasten his gun and powder-horn would be enough for him," he declared, positively. "This he would push ahead as he battled with the current of the river. Landing somewhere below, he could easily hasten up the shore, looking for signs. And long before now, Sandy, he is, let us hope, following on the heels of those treacherous wolves."

"Here is the canoe, Bob," said Sandy, draw-

ing a long breath of relief; for he had fretted at the delay, counting the minutes while the settler paddled down to where they stood waiting.

Quickly they jumped aboard. The canoe was to be hidden on the other shore, so as to afford them a means for recrossing the stream when they returned from the chase. And how sincerely both those devoted brothers hoped that, when this time arrived, be it sooner or later, Kate would be in their company again.

A handshake all around followed, with words of good cheer from those who were compelled to remain behind, despite their desire to be with the brave boys. Then the canoe was pushed out upon the waters of the Ohio, and the paddles sent it flashing over in the direction of the opposite shore, where unknown perils must await the bold adventurers.

"Keep your eyes on the watch for any sign of a red signal!" Bob kept saying, as they began to draw near the northern shore.

Sandy presently gave a cry of delight.

"I see it, Bob!" he exclaimed. "Just below us, there, where that willow hangs over the water. Pat O'Mara has been there, and found where they landed. Now we can take up the

trail, and follow the stealers of our little sister, even if the hunt takes us to the big waters of the north. For never will we return while she remains a prisoner of the red men!"

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRAIL OF THE IROQUOIS

"YES, you are right, Sandy," said Bob, as he, too, discovered the small flaming signal, evidently a part of a large red kerchief he remembered the jovial Irish trapper possessed, and which he was not averse to sacrificing in an emergency.

They headed the boat straight for the willow that hung over the edge of the water, and a minute later its keel grated on the pebbly beach. Both boys instantly jumped ashore, and hastened to reach the signal; for they saw that again had the woodsman left a note in a splintered stick, as though desirous of giving those he knew would surely follow after him such information as he himself had obtained.

"The four Senecas at cabin — Black Beaver, young chief — lodges on shore of Great Lake, far to north, and west of big falls. I push on. We may meet later. Hope! Remember our signal calls!"

Every word was to the point, and in that brief communication the trapper had given them much news. First and most important of all he had confirmed the suspicion both boys had entertained as to its being Black Beaver who had done this cruel and treacherous deed. Then he had told them where the village was located to which the Seneca belonged, which information might yet prove of great value to them in case they were unfortunate enough to lose the trail, and have to push on at a hazard. They had heard of the mighty cataract, Niagara, that lay between two of the lakes, and which was undoubtedly meant.

What he wrote about the signals they also understood to signify that if, at any time, they heard the call of a bird, thrice repeated, it would be his method of communicating the fact that he was near by. Many times had O'Mara amused and interested the Armstrong boys with his clever imitations of various feathered and furred inhabitants of the wilderness; and even taught them to copy the same, so that they could read a message in such sounds.

"We must first of all conceal the dugout," said Bob, when his brother began to exhibit an eagerness to be off.

"Then let us not waste another minute, Bob!" cried Sandy, as he laid hold on the bow of the craft, prepared to do his share toward carrying it into the adjacent bushes, where it might remain hidden until such time as they again wanted to cross the river.

This duty done, Bob was ready to take up the trail.

- "See how thoughtful O'Mara has been," he remarked, immediately.
- "I see what you mean," replied Sandy, quickly. "He has made heavy tracks as he followed after the Indians, so that we might have an easier task. That ought to help us greatly, Bob, don't you think?"
- "Surely," the older boy remarked, as he led the way into the thickest of the neighboring woods.
- "But you look unhappy," continued Sandy, who was quick to read the face of his brother. "What worries you now, Bob? Are you positive that Kate is with these Indians? Once or twice a horrible fear has forced itself into my brain that they may have slain her, and hidden her body away somewhere."
- "No, no, do not think that!" cried Bob, instantly, though he could not repress the shudder

that his brother's gloomy words brought upon him. "I know she is alive, or was when the Indians stepped ashore, for I believe I saw the faint impression of her little moccasin in the earth, almost hidden by the tread of a brave."

- "Then what makes you frown and look so black?" demanded Sandy.
- "You forget that the day is almost done," the other remarked, significantly.
- "To be sure it is," replied Sandy, casting a glance aloft to where glimpses of the sky could be seen through the dense branches of the tall forest trees.
- "And that when night comes we shall no longer be able to follow the trail, while those we hunt can keep right on, hour after hour, putting mile after mile between us. That is what makes me bitter," Bob said, even though he did not pause in his onward movement.
- "But what is to hinder our securing torches, and continuing on as long as we can put one foot before the other?" demanded his brother.
- "An excellent idea, and we must try it," declared Bob, nodding his head as if pleased over this bright thought. "In that way we may at least cut down some of their long lead, which will count sooner or later in our favor."

"Yes," continued the other lad, "and if, by chance, Pat O'Mara should glimpse our moving torch, be sure he will hasten to join us. I will keep an eye out from now on, so as to pick up enough fat pine wood to serve us for torches, once it grows too dark for you to see the trail plainly."

Bob hastened as well as he was able, and, for another hour, they kept moving on, steadily heading into the deeper forest, where perhaps the foot of a white man had never before been set.

Then came the darkness which they dreaded. By slow degrees Bob was finding his task more and more difficult. Time was when he could see the plain trail left by their friend, the Irish trapper, as well as the footprints of the savages, without bending over to any extent. Then he had to get his face closer to the ground, as twilight came on, until, finally, he declared that he could no longer be positive that he was right.

They dared not risk losing the trail. Consequently it became necessary to halt for a brief rest, during which they might munch some of the tough permican provided for just such an emergency. Then, a little later, when they felt

refreshed, the tracking could be resumed by the aid of a flare.

Darkness now surrounded them. The track-less forest stretched ahead, peopled only with enemies, both animal and human. These young pioneers never once faltered in their self-appointed task. If, at any time, such a feeling tried to take possession of their hearts, it was indignantly suppressed. Only a thought of Kate, or of that almost distracted mother whom they had promised so faithfully to serve as though they were men grown, was needed to inspire them anew with determination.

Presently Sandy took his tinder bag, got to work with flint and steel, and, being somewhat of an expert in this necessary woodsman's accomplishment, soon had a torch blazing merrily.

This Bob held as he once more took to the trail, gripping his gun in one hand. Sandy came close at his heels, with his cocked musket ready to be discharged at a second's warning, and endeavoring to see into the impenetrable walls of darkness that surrounded them.

"How does it go, Bob?" he asked after a bit, during which they had covered fully fifty yards.

"Fine!" answered his brother. "I have no

difficulty now, in seeing the tracks. If only they would halt for the night, we might come up with them. But Indians can keep up a dog-trot for hours, you know; and these thieves are doing that now."

- "But can one of them be carrying our sister all this time?" asked Sandy.
- "Not so. Look here, and you will see the print of her moccasin. I know it well, because it is so much smaller than the others," remarked Bob, halting a minute to point to the ground at a certain open spot.
- "Yes," cried Sandy, eagerly, "and surely I ought to know it, too, since I helped Kate make those same moccasins. She is alive and well up to now. But, after all, Kate is a girl, and she will not be able to travel long in this fashion."
- "Then they will either have to stop and make camp, or else pick her up and carry her," Bob declared, positively.
- "But which do you think it will be?" asked his brother.
- "They fear the anger of the whites so much," Bob continued, once more moving on, "that they are anxious to get as far away as they can from the settlement. Perhaps they know Colonel Boone to be our friend, and his name

is feared in every Indian wigwam from Fort Pitt to the Mississippi, and from the Great Lakes down to the southern border of the Dark and Bloody Ground known as Kentucky. They will go on, and carry Kate."

After that for a long time the brothers did not exchange words, save when something came up to excite their curiosity or their fears that they were about to lose the trail.

"I can see signs to tell me they have begun to stop now and then to hide their tracks. Only for the help given by O'Mara I would perhaps have to stop until we had daylight to show us the trail," Bob had declared, much to the distress of his companion; for Sandy was easily influenced to extremes by either good or bad fortune.

"We must go on just as far as we dare tonight," he said, stubbornly. "Every furlong gained will count in the end. As for being tired, I forget all that when I see mother's dear face as she kissed us good-bye, and begged us not to give up until we believed every hope gone."

So, for another half hour, they managed to move along. Three torches had been consumed thus far, and Sandy held only one more. It would probably be sufficient, for human nature has its limit, and the boys could hardly expect to keep up this killing pace all through the long hours of that dreadful night.

Now and then Bob would stop for a brief time to straighten up, and rest his cramped back. At such times it was only natural for him to stare ahead into the black depths of the woods that confronted them, stretching away hundreds of miles to the mysterious north, until finally they ended on the shore of that inland fresh water sea now known as Lake Erie, but at that time going with the others under the general name of the Great Lakes, though some called it after the tribe living on its shore.

It was on one of these breathing halts that Sandy, happening to send a glance back along the hidden path they had come over, gave a low cry, and gripped the arm of his brother convulsively, as he exclaimed in a whisper:

"We are followed, Bob! I surely saw the figure of an Indian flitting from tree to tree, back there! Drop the torch and fall flat, before an arrow comes!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE BARK OF THE RED FOX

Quick to act in the presence of danger, Bob instantly dashed the blazing torch to the ground, and set his foot upon it. Then, in company with his brother, he dropped flat to the earth, as they had been taught to do by the Irish trapper.

They half expected to hear the hiss of a feathered shaft as it whizzed through the air over them, and each boy gripped his musket nervously, as he crouched there among the bushes, waiting for he hardly knew what.

- "Do you hear them coming?" whispered Sandy.
- "No," replied the other; "but we must not stay here. They will try to surround us, and cut us off from flight."
- "But if we leave here we must lose the trail," objected Sandy.
- "True," replied his brother in the same guarded tone; "but should we be captured or

killed what then would become of poor little Kate? Come!"

As usual, Sandy was ready to give in to the better judgment of his older brother, and hence, when Bob began to creep away, he kept as close at his heels as possible.

Doubtless their hearts beat faster than usual as the two lads thus moved over the ground. They had not gone ten paces when again Sandy drew the attention of the one in the lead to something he had discovered.

"Look to the left!" he whispered, as he poked at Bob's foot with the muzzle of his gun.

Turning his head, Bob saw a startling sight.

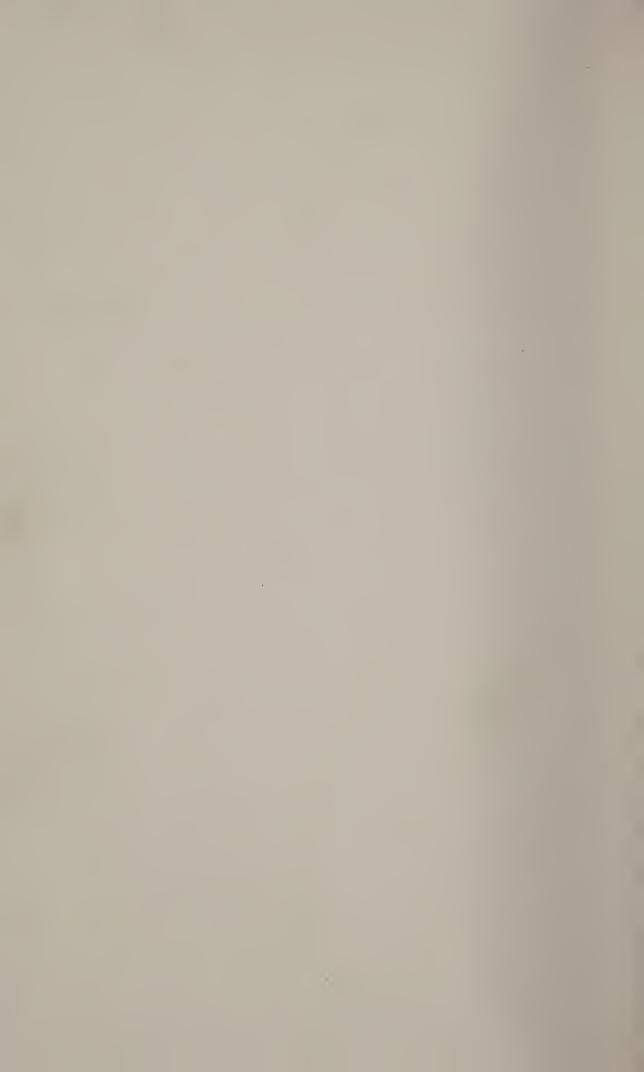
The late moon was just rising in the east. Because of a dip in the ground, and also a thinning out of the trees in that quarter, due to some tornado that had made a slash in the timbers, her blood-red disc could be seen just above the horizon.

And there, plainly marked against the face of the harvest moon, they could see the head and shoulders of an Indian brave! So plain did the picture appear that it was possible to even distinguish the feather that stood up in the hair of the red man.

"We must turn the other way," said Bob,



"PLAINLY MARKED AGAINST THE FACE OF THE HARVEST MOON, THEY COULD SEE THE HEAD AND SHOULDERS OF AN INDIAN BRAVE!"



as his brother crawled up alongside him, so that their heads came close together.

- "Wait!" whispered the other. "Somehow that feather seems familiar to me."
- "Do you mean it might be Blue Jacket?" asked Bob, eagerly; for, to tell the truth, he himself had had a similar idea flash through his mind.
- "Nothing more. See, he seems to be looking around calmly, as though in no hurry to make a hostile move. There, he has put his hand up to his mouth. I believe he means to signal. Yes, listen, there goes the bark of the red fox, which you remember he always uses to tell us he is near. It must be Blue Jacket!"

Bob, however, laid a hand on his reckless brother.

"Let me try him first, Sandy," he said; and immediately there broke out the singular grunting sound which a hedgehog makes when turning over the dead leaves looking for his food.

Immediately a low voice called out:

"Bob! Sandy!"

After that there could no longer be any doubt as to the identity of the Indian whose head had been so strangely outlined against the circle of the moon. Gaining their feet, the two young pioneers directed the other to where they were standing. And it was with considerable satisfaction they thus made the discovery that it was a friend instead of a foe whose coming had alarmed them.

"Ugh!" said Blue Jacket, as he gripped a hand of each, having learned this method of greeting among the whites while an inmate of the Armstrong cabin, recovering from his wound. "Glad meet Bob, Sandy. Much wonder who carry torch in woods. Think paleface boy, no can be sure. What hunt so far away settlement?"

"Kate has been stolen by four Seneca Indians, and they are speeding as fast as they can go toward their village away to the far north!" Bob explained.

Had it been a white man he would have shown more or less astonishment at this startling news. Blue Jacket, being an Indian, and schooled to repress his feelings on all occasions, merely grunted, as he replied:

"Bad! Much hard get back. How know?"
Between them the two boys related how the awful shock had come upon them while they were about to return home after a successful hunt. They also mentioned what the reader

already knows about Pat O'Mara being on the trail in advance, determined to save the daughter of his good friends.

"And you, Blue Jacket, will you not join us?" asked Sandy.

The young Shawanee never hesitated an instant to consider the matter.

"Me go where Bob, Sandy go. Never forget him mother, what she do. Tell much more. No can walk in woods till rest. Four Iroquois say? Who?" he said, in the terse way that was so much a part of his stoical nature.

"We believe that she was stolen by a young Seneca chief known by the name of Black Beaver among the settlers. Do you know him, Blue Jacket?" asked Bob.

He felt the Shawanee start, which told him that what he said must have given their red friend a shock.

"Black Beaver sent down by Pontiac, visit my people with war arrow. Tell that red men all over north ready dig up hatchet, and go on warpath. How Bob, Sandy see um?" he asked.

"He and three of his braves came to our settlement some time ago," returned the white boy. "They created quite an excitement, for it was believed that we were about to be attacked by the enemy. But they held their hands out, palms upward, in token of peace, and said they were a long way from their lodges, with their tobacco gone, and little ammunition left with which to kill game. So we gave them of both, and they pretended to go their way, saying that they were the friends of the white man."

"Yes," broke in Sandy just then; "but we saw how the young chief looked hungrily at our pretty little sister, Kate, and both of us worried, for fear that some day he might return to give us trouble. But we did not think it would come so soon. He hung around until the chance arrived; then the blow fell."

"Blue Jacket saw trail through the woods," continued the other, in his low musical voice; "where four braves and a squaw be followed by a paleface. He think something wrong. Then night come, and he camp under tree. Just at moonrise see dancing fire through woods. Think Indians hunt deer with torch as much do. Just get close, fire go. But Blue Jacket know then it not Indian, but white boy. He think of Bob, Sandy. Listen for while; then give bark of red fox. Now know all."

"And you will stick to us through thick and thin, Blue Jacket?" demanded Sandy.

The Shawanee brave once more thrust out his dusky hand, and gravely took that of each of the young pioneers in turn. They knew from this that they might count on such assistance as he could give them. Actions take the place of words with an Indian; a look or a movement counts for volumes.

All made their way back to the trail, so that there would be no delay later on, when they were ready to once more take up the pursuit of the girl-stealers.

- "How long must we lie idle here?" groaned Sandy, when a full hour had passed by, without any further action.
- "Perhaps until morning," replied his brother, "so you had better try and get some sleep. We must be rested in order to carry on the pursuit."
- "But supposing they were not more than a mile away from here," continued Sandy. "We might come upon them in an hour, if only we kept moving. It seems foolish to stop just because we are a little tired."

Bob knew that the poor fellow was so stiff he could hardly get up, once he lay upon the ground; but the spirit was willing, if the flesh proved weak, and Sandy would have gone on if he had to crawl.

- "If they have halted they would not sleep without a sentry," said Bob.
- "That is true, I suppose," admitted the other, grudgingly. "All Indians are careful not to be taken by surprise. Yes, they would be on their guard; but what of that, Bob? Surely, with Blue Jacket to help us, we could creep up close without any one being the wiser."
- "You forget," said Bob, "that we could never follow the trail without a light; and those sharp eyes of the sentry would discover our torch long before we knew they were near. Then we would be made a target for a shower of bullets, and perhaps poisoned arrows."

Sandy was utterly disheartened. This sort of argument seemed unanswerable. He just gave a disgusted grunt, rolled over on the ground, and not another word did he speak during the entire balance of that long night.

Bob knew that sleep had finally overtaken his brother, for he could hear his regular breathing after a time. And he was glad of the fact, for both of them stood much in need of rest before they would be in condition to take up the chase once more.

Morning found them awake, and ready to make a fresh start just as soon as the daylight proved strong enough for the Indian to see the trail. Bob was only too willing to turn over the lead to Blue Jacket, knowing that, while he, himself, might serve fairly well, he was not at all in the same class as the trained young Shawanee, accustomed to reading every tiny sign that marked the tracks of the red fugitives.

Once again they chewed some of the dried venison, washing the crude meat down with a draught from a near-by brook. Refreshed after their sleep, the two boys declared themselves to be in good condition, and ready to make a day of it, if need be.

More than once Bob noticed that the Indian cast an apprehensive glance upward. Sandy, too, saw this action, and took the first opportunity to question his brother as to what it might signify.

"Why does he turn his eyes up to the tops of the trees every little while?" he said in an aside to his brother, as the two of them trailed after Blue Jacket.

- "The sun rose red this morning, you may have noticed?" replied Bob.
- "Yes, that is true, for I saw it myself," Sandy went on.
- "And that stands for rain, all woodsmen believe."

Every rover of the big timber in those days put the utmost faith in such signs. If they saw the sun set in a sea of angry gold they would make ready for bad weather, just as surely as they believed the north lay close to the direction where the moss grew heaviest on those forest trees.

- "But we have no fear of the rain," declared Sandy, impatiently; "let it come, for a wetting can't stop us from following Black Beaver day in and day out till we overtake him."
- "Still, if the trail is washed out, how then are we to follow?" asked Bob, with a frown on his face.
- "Oh! what a fool I was not to understand what you meant," said the younger boy, now looking up toward the heavens quite as anxiously as their dusky guide had done.
 - "We can only hope that it will keep off long

enough to let us come up with the redskins," said Bob, thinking to buoy up his brother's sinking spirits.

"Or that Pat O'Mara may be able to overtake the thieves, and rescue our sister," Sandy observed.

Then they fell into silence again, each busy with his own painful thoughts. All the time Blue Jacket was leading them on at a sort of dog-trot. His eyes followed the trail in a manner simply marvellous; and Bob again and again felt a sense of delight because good fortune had sent this red friend across their path just when they needed assistance most.

Hours passed, and they had covered many miles. Still, upon being questioned by the nervous Sandy, the Shawanee brave could not say that they were any nearer the little band they sought than when they had started, that morning.

How long this pursuit would keep up, who could say? Day might follow day, without their gaining any perceptible advantage. As a last resort, of course, they could make direct for the big water to the north, and seek the village from which Black Beaver had come. But that would mean disheartening delay, with ac-

cumulated difficulties about effecting the rescue of their sister.

Nor was this day fated to entirely pass without something occurring to thrill both young pioneers, and prove once more the truth of Pat O'Mara's words when he warned them of the constant need of watchfulness when abroad in the forest.

Blue Jacket in the advance was swiftly covering the trail, for he had heard a distant growl of thunder, and did not fancy what was coming. With his head bowed in earnest examination of the tracks left by those who had gone before, he could hardly be expected to see what lay ahead of him, leaving that for his comrades.

"Oh! Bob, look there!" Sandy suddenly exclaimed, as he raised his musket; "a panther just crouching to leap on our guide's shoulders. Shoot him, quick!"

CHAPTER XVII

PERILS OF THE WILDERNESS

"No shoot! no shoot!" cried Blue Jacket, who seemed to size up the situation instantly; though up to that time he had not even suspected that he was about to be made the object of a savage attack on the part of a panther.

Bob, too, understood the motive that influenced the Shawanee brave to exclaim in this way, as he jerked out his knife and threw himself in an attitude of defence. Should a musket be discharged, there was always a chance that the report might be carried to the ears of the Senecas, if they happened to be within a few miles of the spot.

Few Indians used guns in those days, the vast majority depending still upon the bows and arrows of their race, backed by tomahawks and knives, and sometimes war clubs in time of battle. Hence, they might suspect that pursuers were on their trail, should the boom of a heavily-loaded musket be carried to their ears.

So Bob threw out his hand, and instantly

covered the pan of his brother's gun, so that, when the hammer fell, it caught his fingers, and no spark followed. Bob winced under the sharp pain; but he had accomplished his end, and what mattered a trifling cut?

But the panther had not waited all this time to accommodate these intruders in his forest The boys saw the sheen of his preserves. satiny sides as he sprang.

"Oh! he missed!" gasped Sandy; but Bob knew why this was so, for he had seen the agile young Indian jump sideway just at the critical instant, so that, while the aim of the big cat may have been correct, he only alighted upon the ground.

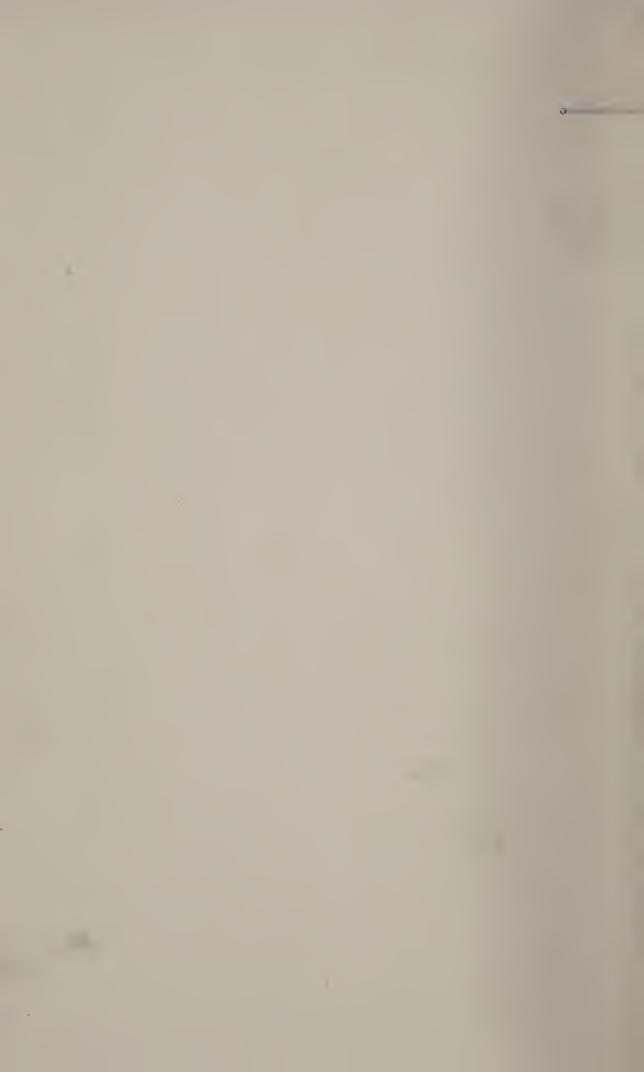
Blue Jacket never wavered, but instantly threw himself upon the gray beast. His keenpointed knife was raised, and came down once, twice, thrice in less than as many seconds. was no longer glinting in the sunlight, for after that first descent the steel seemed to be dulled.

Both boys pushed forward, eager to get in a blow that would be of some assistance to this devoted red friend, who counted not his own safety or comfort when a chance arose whereby he could help his paleface comrades.

They had dropped their guns as useless, since



"THE BOYS SAW THE SHEEN OF HIS SATINY SIDES AS HE SPRANG"



they could not be fired. Bob had drawn his knife, while Sandy had a hatchet in his grip; and both circled around, looking for an opening.

The Indian and the panther were revolving so fast, however, that it seemed well nigh impossible for any outsider to get in a blow, without running grave chances of seriously injuring the very one they wanted to assist.

And, while they thus made half-hearted blows, fearful lest they strike their good ally, Blue Jacket suddenly sprang aside, leaving the animal struggling on the ground. In vain it attempted to follow its human adversary. The ready knife of the stalwart young Shawanee had struck in too deeply, and already was the panther feeling the throes of approaching death.

Even as the boys gazed, spellbound, the animal stiffened out, after one last violent movement. Blue Jacket was breathing very hard; but upon his set face they could see the look that comes to a victor in a well-fought battle.

"Are you hurt much, Blue Jacket?" asked Sandy, fearful lest those terrible claws might have torn the young Shawanee.

The other glanced down at a few places where

the blood had commenced to show, as marking the scratches he had received; then he shook his head scornfully.

- "Not much hurt," he announced. "Panther hard kill—fight back—take many times finish," and he opened the fingers of both hands to illustrate how many strokes he had made with that knife before he felt that he had accomplished his purpose.
- "But why didn't you let me shoot him?" demanded Sandy, as though feeling hurt, because at that short distance he knew one shot would have surely finished the "woods terror," as such beasts were known at the time.
- "Make noise—tell Iroquois we here—no good, see, Sandy?" was the way Blue Jacket put it; and Sandy immediately realized how great a sacrifice the other had just made in order to keep their presence on the trail unknown to those they hunted.

He looked at his brother, and drew a long breath.

- "Where could we have found a better friend, Bob?" he said, earnestly.
- "We must have looked a long way, Sandy," returned the other. "But let me put a little salve my mother made on those cuts, Blue

Jacket. There is poison in the claws of a tiger cat, and you may have a bad time, unless we look out for it."

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian, even while he allowed Bob to do as he wished. "Much papoose, warriors think. No care 'bout hurt. Get well, bimeby. Blue Jacket come 'cross medicine grass soon, chew and put on cut, good. If white squaw make, then try. Ugh!"

Anything Mrs. Armstrong did was all right in the eyes of the young Shawanee brave. He had watched her, and learned to respect the gentle woman who ruled the Armstrong cabin with a sceptre of love.

Leaving the dead panther where it had fallen, the three pressed onward again. If, during the balance of that weary day, the limbs of Blue Jacket ached, no one ever knew it, for not a single complaint or groan passed his lips. Bob realized that he in all probability suffered, for some of the scratches had been pretty deep; but he also understood the singular nature of Indians, and how it was considered childish to show any evidence of pain.

Night came on, and they were forced to halt, with those they hunted still far ahead. How the Iroquois managed to travel so far and so

fast puzzled both boys, especially since they knew that Kate could not have possibly kept up under that fierce strain.

Blue Jacket told them that there were occasions when the footprints of the girl utterly vanished for a mile or more. At such times he would even point out which of the four Indians must be carrying her, because the indentation of his moccasins showed deeper than those of his companions.

And the boys were astonished at the simplicity of this reading of signs. Every hour they found something new to marvel over in connection with the work of their dusky friend. He pointed out twigs that had been bent and righted; to leaves that had been displaced by the feet of the fugitives; and by such means easily figured just how long a time had elapsed since the others had passed.

They started again at daybreak and, all the morning, followed the trail of the Iroquois.

The storm, that had threatened on the previous day and then passed by without a single drop falling, now came back for a second attempt. And this time they were not fated to escape.

"We are in for it," said Bob, when about

noon the crash of thunder sounded close at hand, accompanied by vivid lightning.

- "Yes," declared Sandy, making a rueful face, "I think I can hear the rain beating down in the treetops even now, over there. What a pity, when we were gradually overtaking the red thieves. Oh! what if we lose them, and have nothing left to follow? What can we do then, Bob?"
- "Just what I said before," replied his brother, between his set teeth, as still another crash of thunder made the woods echo with its roll. "We have only one plan to follow, then. Blue Jacket is of the same opinion; for I talked it over with him this morning. We must push straight on for the Great Lakes, and try to way-lay the party before they reach their village."
 - "A desperate chance," groaned Sandy.
- "But we said we would never give up until the last gasp, Sandy. You forget, too, that we have a good and wise friend at work for us," Bob went on, cheerfully.
- "You mean Pat O'Mara?" replied the other, quickly. "Yes, I did forget. I am too apt to be hasty, I fear. Oh! I do hope he may be able to snatch Kate from the power of the young chief, Black Beaver. But why should he have

stolen her at all? Kate is only a child, too young for any one to want to have for a squaw."

- "I have been thinking about something Blue Jacket told me," said Bob.
- "Then please let me know, too, for I am all in a mix," pleaded his brother.
- "He said that he knew Black Beaver had only a short time ago lost a little sister by some disease. He told me that the old squaw, his mother, sat day by day out where the child was laid away, after the custom of the Indians, the body being sewed up in many thicknesses of buffalo skins, and placed on a platform, where the wolves could not reach her."
- "Yes, I saw an Indian graveyard when I was a prisoner among the Shawanees, and it was just as you say," declared Sandy, eagerly. "I know that daily the squaws come to talk with the spirits of those who are gone. I saw them placing earthen bowls of succotash on the ground, believing that the steam that arose was spirit food, since it vanished, and no one knew where it went."
- "Blue Jacket said that Black Beaver cared much more for his sister than most Indians do," Bob continued, between the angry growlings of the thunder; "and that he feared the

old squaw would lose her mind if she kept on mourning. Now, you remember how he looked at our sister Kate when he came in for a supply of tobacco and maize? I really believe he had a sudden idea flash into his mind when he saw how pretty she was."

"Now I understand what you mean," cried Sandy, excitedly. "He believed that our Kate might take the place of the sister that was dead! They would color her skin, and teach her to forget that her people were the hated palefaces. Bob, I believe you are right; and somehow the thought gives me much comfort, for then our little Kate will not suffer harm at the hands of Black Beaver and those with him."

There was no time for further conversation, for the storm now rushed down upon them with terrific violence. With the howling wind, the flash of lightning, and the crash of thunder came a tremendous downpour of rain. It was possibly the breaking up of summer, and might be followed shortly by frost, such are the rapid changes that mark the meeting of the seasons.

They had found a means for sheltering themselves from the worst of the storm. A hollow tree might have answered fully as well; but, with those frequent zigzag flashes of the deadly electric fluid, none of them felt like taking such desperate chances, especially when a cleft in some rocks opened an avenue of escape.

Here they cowered and waited as the storm rolled over. Bob knew of course that such a thing as trailing the Senecas after this was entirely out of the question; and that the only thing remaining to them was to strike out north, in the hope of finding the village to which Black Beaver belonged, and intercepting the party.

That would mean the placing of some hundreds of miles between themselves and the dearly-beloved cabin on the Ohio, where that little mother waited in daily hope and expectation of their return, with the lost Kate; but, for themselves these brave boys gave little thought. They were ready to face every species of peril in the endeavor to rescue their sister.

When the wind had ceased to howl, and only the mutter of the retreating thunder in the distance told that the storm was over, they came forth, grim and determined-looking, all three.

Sandy tightened his belt; and there even was something suggestive of what was in his mind about that little action. It looked as though he were preparing for the tremendous tramp that loomed up ahead, when they must cross rivers,

thread their way through tangled forests where few if any of their kind had ever before stepped; and face all manner of dangers by day and by night.

Blue Jacket never even asked what they would have him do; for he already knew the plan of campaign. Deliberately he turned, until the western sun, shining out from the broken clouds like a ball of gold, was exactly on his left. Then he started to swiftly walk away.

No longer did the young brave look down upon the ground as he moved along. There existed no need for such a thing, since the trail had been utterly washed out by that deluge of rain. Henceforth the trackless wilderness lay before them, and at the other end they hoped to find the village in which Black Beaver had his wigwam.

Even upon the face of Sandy had come a grim look that seemed out of place in the features of a half-grown lad; but in those pioneer days responsibility set its mark early on the growing generation, and even a lad of fifteen could shoulder the cares and burdens of manhood.

Days would come, and days would pass, and night must follow night. Sometimes sun and stars would beckon them onward; again perhaps storms would buffet these bold adventurers; but through it all they would push resolutely onward, with but that one impulse urging them on, the rescue of Kate.

What the near future held for them no mortal could say; but, no matter what lay beyond, Bob and Sandy would press on toward the goal, though they had to face the whole of the Six Nations, or the confederated tribes Pontiac had bound together in his wild hope for a general Indian war.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BIG WATER AT LAST

"WILL we ever get there, do you think, Bob!"

Sandy Armstrong asked this question for the tenth time one day, as the trio of young adventurers rested at noon, after tramping since early dawn.

They had persisted in heading into the north ever since the day of the storm. Weary days and nights they had been. Sandy, being less resolute than his older brother, had fretted under the strain, and kept asking whether they must not be near the end of their pilgrimage.

They had met many trials on the way. Rivers they had swam, holding their guns and ammunition, as well as their garments, on a log so as to keep them dry, which trick was in frequent use among the pioneers of the day.

It was the duty of Bob to constantly strengthen his brother; and thus he even smiled, a bit sadly it may be true, as he turned upon Sandy.

- "Blue Jacket knows; and he tells me that he can smell the big water in the air right now," he observed.
- "You mean the Great Lake, on the shore of which, somewhere, the Iroquois have their village—is that it?" demanded Sandy, brightening up wonderfully.
- "Yes, and he also tells me that we are apt to come out upon it before the sun goes down to-night," Bob continued, encouragingly.
- "Well," said Sandy, heaving a big sigh, "I shall be glad if it turns out to be so. I am so tired of waiting, day after day, and plunging into constant forests. If it wasn't for Kate's peril I could enjoy this journey, for you know I always said I meant to follow in the footsteps of Kenton, and look on new sights; but, as it is, I can think of nothing but these three things that trouble us."
 - "Three?" remarked Bob, as if surprised.
- "Why, yes. There is Kate, to begin with," Sandy started to say.
- "And you are also thinking of our mother, should the dreaded Indian attack come when we are away?" Bob pursued.
- "Surely. There were many ugly signs of it. But, when I remember how our neighbor, Mr.

Brewster, gave us his word that he would take her into his own family while we were gone, and look after her as if she belonged under his cabin roof, somehow I do not feel quite so bad."

"But you said three, and that is only two causes," Bob went on. "Are you still thinking about father, Sandy?"

"Surely," the younger brother answered back. "The more we plunge into this unbroken wilderness the greater become my fears for him. There were only four in the party. If the Indians ever discovered their trail, they would follow them like hungry wolves. Day and night they might hang about, seeking opportunities to ambush them. Oh! why did not Colonel Boone, or Simon Kenton, happen along at the time they were starting?"

"Cheer up!" cried Bob, slapping his brother on the shoulder encouragingly. "We shall be happy yet, and all together again, separated as we may be now. Our first duty is to find Kate, and steal her away from our enemies. Then, when we get home, we will only have to wait for our father to return, after the snow flies. I only hope he is able to cross those terrible mountains before the ravines are filled, neck high, with the drifts."

"But," said Sandy, suddenly, as if he suspected that these signs of despondency might be wrongly interpreted by his companion, "I hope you do not think I am weakening, Bob?"

"Not I," returned the older one, instantly. "By this time I ought to know your obstinate nature better than that, Sandy. You may complain, and seem downhearted at times; but there is no give up about you."

"That is true," nodded Sandy, as he set his teeth hard together. "We started out to rescue our sister from the hands of the Indians; and that we will do, if we live. But, Bob, have we not rested enough? I am just wild to set eyes on that wonderful inland sea about which Pat O'Mara and Simon Kenton have told us so much."

"Yes, we will go on," said Bob, quickly rising to his feet; and then, as Blue Jacket drew near, he asked further: "About how many hours' journey before we come upon the big water, Blue Jacket?"

Whereupon the young Shawanee brave deliberated a minute, after which he gravely held up two fingers of his right hand.

"Soon get there, Bob, Sandy," he said, quietly. "No can smell big water further two

hours' walk. You wait, see Blue Jacket speak with straight tongue."

"And he ought to know, Sandy," continued Bob; "because, you see, Blue Jacket has once before looked on the big water which some men call Erie. Only a short two hours; that will soon pass. Come, let us put out our best foot now."

Once again they plunged into the thickets ahead, always with the Indian guide in the van. Blue Jacket had indeed proven a friend. Not only had he led them in almost direct line to the north, and managed to avoid contact with any roving band of Indians; but at the same time he had helped supply the little rescue party with fresh meat.

It happened that at the time he met the two young pioneers the brave carried his customary bow and arrows. Few of his race equalled Blue Jacket in the use of this old-time Indian weapon. He could send a feathered shaft with wonderful accuracy, whether aimed at a human foe or a wild animal of the forest.

Debarred from using their noisy guns on account of the dangers that an explosion might bring upon them, the boys would have suffered from lack of fresh food but for the dexterity with which their dusky ally used his hickory bow, with its flint-tipped arrows, feathered with quills from the wild goose.

Once he brought down a bounding deer that seemd in a fair way to escape, much to the admiration of both white lads, who had never before witnessed such an exhibition of fine shooting.

On another occasion he had discovered several wild turkeys roosting on the branch of a big pine tree on a knoll, and, after considerable creeping, managed to get close enough, on the leeward side of the wary birds, to bring a haughty gobbler to the ground, pierced through and through with an arrow, so that they feasted that night right royally.

Then Blue Jacket also knew just how to build a fire with very dry wood that might not give forth any smoke, such as keen and suspicious eyes would discover. It was always started in a cleft, or a hole in the ground, nor did they ever keep it going after night set in.

All these precautions were absolutely necessary, for they were in a hostile country, where every human being must be considered an enemy, whether he might be a red man or a French Canadian trapper.

The summer was now gone. Touches of frost appeared each morning, now that the pilgrims of the great forest ascended continually further north. But they were young, hardy and vigorous, so that little they cared for this. The thought of the mission that drew them thus far away from their Ohio River home proved sufficient to make their pulses throb, and all minor troubles be ignored.

An hour passed. Blue Jacket plodded on, showing not the faintest sign of weariness. Indeed, it seemed to Sandy that the young Shawanee brave must be made of iron to be able to stand up under all they had passed through without exhibiting the least symptom of fatigue.

Even the brothers by now seemed to feel a peculiar dampness to the air, that in a way betrayed the near presence of a large body of water.

"At any time, Sandy, you can expect to set eyes on the Great Lake," remarked Bob, while they were pushing through an unusually dense patch of woods, where the close growing trees ahead shut out all sign of what lay beyond.

Blue Jacket heard, and gave him a nod that seemed to tell Bob they might have their first

view of that wonderful inland sea before many minutes passed.

A short time later they came upon the verge of the forest. All at once a vacancy appeared beyond, a vast open expanse, and Bob had himself caught a musical ripple that he knew must proceed from waves gently rolling up the beach.

The Great Lake was before them, and, standing thus among the bordering trees, the three gazed wonderingly out upon that mighty expanse.

Although they had lived for a number of years in Richmond, both Bob and Sandy had only a hazy recollection of ever having seen the vast ocean so close by; so that this, their first introduction to what seemed a boundless expanse of water, was startling.

As far as their eyes could reach nothing but a level horizon seemed to exist, where the water met the lowering sky line. To the east and west the same monotonous view was presented. Today, where dark smoke from the funnels of countless busy steamers may greet the eye of the onlooker, there was at that time absolutely nothing, not even a canoe, at first appearing to the sight of the three youths.

"Oh!" exclaimed Sandy, his breast heaving

with the sensation of a rover who delights in new and novel sights, "it is glorious, Bob! If I could only forget about Kate for a minute, I'd say it was well worth all our trials and suffering. One of my dreams has come true, and some day I am determined that the other will, too."

"Yes," replied his brother, soberly; "I know that you are fairly wild to set eyes on that wonderful river De Soto discovered, and which they call the Mississippi. Perhaps some day you may have your wish, Sandy; but pray Heaven that no such mission takes you to its shores as has fetched us hither."

"That could never be," replied Sandy. "If we are blessed with the recovery of our dear sister this time, she will never again be allowed to leave the sight of those who can and will protect her. But, see, Blue Jacket has noticed something. He moves back into the woods, and beckons to us to do the same. What can it be, do you suppose, Bob?"

"He seems to be watching the point of land that stands out into the water," said Bob. "It has trees on it; but there are open spaces, too. Blue Jacket must have discovered something moving there." "Perhaps it is a deer, and he means to get a shot with his bow and arrows?" suggested the younger brother.

"Not so, for he is not handling his bow," remarked Bob; and immediately added: "There! I saw it move myself; and, Sandy, unless I was mistaken, it must have been a canoe gliding along the other side of the tongue of land, heading outward."

Both lads immediately stepped further back among the trees. They understood that the chances were ten to one, at least, that, if they came upon any human being along the shore of the Great Lake, it must be an Indian, and therefore one to be distrusted on sight.

Though the Iroquois, or Six Nations, had always been friendly with the English, and opposed to the French Canadian trappers and traders, still, the new conditions that were beginning to arise, where the Colonies had begun to defy the king, made them separate the sheep from the goats. They favored the Tories, who remained in league with the king's policies; but were ready to take up arms against the insurgents, already beginning to call themselves Americans.

Three minutes later a canoe darted out from

behind the point of land, and started along the lake, about a quarter of a mile from the shore.

- "Oh! look!" said Sandy, who had the keener eyesight; "there are just five in it, Bob, and one of them is a girl!"
- "Yes," replied the other, whose lips were colorless as he gazed eagerly at the moving craft, where several flashing paddles were working industriously; "just the same number as Black Beaver's band. But, Sandy, we do not know. To me it looks as if the girl might be a squaw. She is surely dressed like one, and, as well as I can see, her face seems to be that of an Indian."
- "Oh! but you forget, Bob," declared the other lad, earnestly, "that we believe Black Beaver means to make our sister into a Seneca girl. Four braves and a girl—it must be those we seek!"
- "Even Blue Jacket is puzzled, if I read his face rightly," said Bob. "And so all we can do is to try and keep up with the canoe until it comes ashore. Then we will soon learn the truth. I only pray that what you think may turn out to be so, for it would make our mission the easier."

CHAPTER XIX

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT

"They must land soon," said Sandy, when they had been trying to keep up with the canoe for a long time, though without brilliant success, for it was far ahead of the three scouts, possibly a couple of miles.

"Yes," Bob made answer; "for the day is near an end, and they will wish to camp. There, see, they have at last headed toward the shore. We must make sure to note where the boat lands, so that we can take up the trail if they plunge into the forest."

A short time later and they had seen the canoe pushed up on the sandy beach. After the customary manner of the red men, it was immediately picked up and carried away, doubtless to be secreted among the bushes, either until morning or until some future occasion when its services would be needed.

"Now what is our next move?" asked Sandy.

"Keep straight along until we are within 208

striking distance of the spot. But let us seek advice from Blue Jacket. He will know what is best," was Bob's answer.

To their surprise the Shawanee brave decided that it would be just as well for them to remain where they were, and rest an hour or more. When darkness had fallen they could step out on the open beach, and make as good time as though they struggled along all the while through the dense underbrush of the woods.

So they lay down and waited, meanwhile munching a little food in order to sustain them through whatever might befall them that night.

Finally Blue Jacket arose, and spoke a few low words. Both brothers were immediately on their feet, eager to be moving. And, after their days of fighting with the rough country over which their long journey had taken them, it was certainly something of a relief to be able to stride over the sandy stretch of beach.

Presently Sandy uttered a low cry:

"A canoe! Why cannot we use that?"

Bob did not reply, but looked questioning at Blue Jacket. The Indian nodded, and soon the three had entered a long canoe that rested on the beach and contained two broad paddles. The two boys took the paddles, and presently the craft was moving silently and swiftly over the placid waters of Lake Erie.

"Not too far from shore. No can see other canoe if go too far," cautioned the Indian.

He stood in the bow of the canoe, his eyes on the alert for the first sign of the other craft. Thus over a mile was covered when the Indian gave a sign to turn back to the beach.

Just as the Shawanee had promised, they arrived in the neighborhood of the landing place of the canoe about as soon as if they had kept diligently pushing forward through the forest, with its various pitfalls, ravines and thickets.

Bob was eagerly waiting for the verdict which he knew must soon fall from the lips of Blue Jacket. He saw the young Indian craning his neck in order to take in all the surroundings, although his attention was of course directed more toward the depths of the woods than out upon the heaving lake.

Then Blue Jacket's hand fell upon the arm of Bob.

"Ugh! look, it is well! They camp!" he grunted.

And Bob, following the line of the other's extended arm, saw the glimmer of a fire almost hidden in the dense forest.

- "We shall soon know now, Sandy," he observed, cheerfully. "Blue Jacket means to creep forward, and get close enough to the camp to learn whether these are they we have sought, or if we have to go on further."
- "But he has already told us he could see that the braves were Senecas, from the feathers in their scalplocks, and their manner of dress?" declared Sandy.
- "That is true," Bob replied, softly; "but let us drop down here, and wait for him to return. He cannot be long."

The Shawanee glided away as silently as a shadow, leaving Bob and Sandy at the point where a clump of silver birches would guide him again to their hiding place.

- "What if he comes to tell us it is our Kate?" demanded the younger brother.
- "Then we can have but one duty, and that is to wrest her away from those who would try to hold her," came the steady reply.
 - "They will resist," remarked Sandy.
- "It will not be well for them if they do," said his companion, with that stern look upon

his face, as seen in the starlight, that always reminded Sandy of their father.

The minutes fairly dragged along. Sandy tried to count so as to have something to occupy his mind and keep him quiet; but he found it impossible to keep from thinking of that dear little sister whom they had come so far to save.

Then, without the slightest warning, Blue Jacket stood beside them, grave, and with folded arms. Bob guessed the truth instantly from the manner of their red ally, for, had the other any good news to declare, he must have shown it. Sandy was not so ready a reader of human nature, and immediately exclaimed in a whisper:

- "What success did you have, Blue Jacket? Is it our sister, and those braves the Senecas who stole her away from our mother's cabin?"
- "No Black Beaver, no paleface girl. Seneca braves, and young squaw, that all!" replied the spy, stolidly.

Of course the sanguine Sandy was terribly disappointed; so much so that he allowed a groan to break from his lips. After which once more his resolution took a firm grip upon him.

"Then we must forget all about this, and push on to find the village where Black Beaver,

the thief, has his lodge. It keeps getting harder and harder; but nothing is going to stop us, is it, Bob? "he declared, grimly.

"Nothing!" echoed the older brother, as he pressed Sandy's hand.

They lay down, almost exhausted, and sought to secure the rest of which they were so sorely in need. With the coming of another day they watched until the little party once more launched their canoe, and started paddling off toward the east.

To Bob this was a mere incident that interested him but little. Blue Jacket on the other hand saw a deep significance in the move. He knew it very probably indicated that the village to which these Indians belonged was located somewhere toward the east, or they would hardly be going in the direction of the rising sun, and that was a most important point for them to know, now that the big water blocked their further travel to the north.

Through the entire day they moved steadily along, at first in the canoe they had found, and then, abandoning the canoe, they continued on foot. But conditions had commenced to assume a different aspect. Three separate times during this day Blue Jacket's amazing power

of observation, or intuition, had saved them from running into danger. The woods seemed to be full of parties of Indians, either hunting, or heading toward some central point, where possibly they expected to hold a grand powwow or "palaver," as a council was called by the bordermen.

Upon questioning Blue Jacket, after they had hidden themselves, and watched fully a dozen blanketed figures pass in Indian file, silent and mysterious, Bob was not much surprised to learn that it was the opinion of their red guide that these warriors could not be out on a hunt, else they would never have kept together in the way they did.

Other signs, which the quick eye of the Shawanee could catch, told him that it was no foray in search of fresh meat that took these dusky sons of the forest abroad.

"Pottawottomies," Blue Jacket had muttered. "Come from setting sun, up by other big water, Detroit way. Something doing, Bob, Sandy. No travel so far not so. Mebbe we learn same soon. Much war drum sound. Heap trouble for paleface settlers along Ohio. Ugh!"

"He says those Indians were Pottawotto-

mies, Bob," whispered Sandy. "I wonder now if that firebrand, Pontiac, is up in this region? Perhaps we may even set eyes on him before we start for home."

"Yell, as for me," remarked his brother, "I'd take little pleasure in doing that; for he has an evil name among the settlements. Many border posts have gone up in flame and smoke because of Pontiac, and the renegades that follow him, warring upon their kind. According to my mind it would be a blessed day for pioneers everywhere if a bullet could be sent to lay the monster low."

Little did either of them suspect, while thus talking, how soon they were to be granted a most wonderful opportunity for seeing the notorious sachem, whose name had for years thrilled the hearts of a multitude of mothers, as they sheltered their children in their arms, and listened to the sounds of the mysterious forest, peopled with cruel and crafty red foes.

All through this day the three continued to head toward the land where the terrible waters fell from the lofty rocks with a roar that was deafening. To the superstitious Indians, Niagara's mighty and unceasing clamor was the

voice of the Great Spirit. Their medicine men claimed to be able to interpret what messages were being sent from the Happy Hunting Grounds for the guidance of the Great Spirit's favorite children with the redskins. And for centuries, doubtless, had the cataract also been the scene of sacrifices, when beautiful maidens were sent over its brink to appease an angry Manitou.

"Why, the woods are full of them," said Sandy, when, just before dusk, they were again compelled to hide in order to let a file of solemn warriors pass by.

Bob was more than uneasy. He saw readily enough that, if what Blue Jacket suspected turned out to be the truth, and that a grand council was about to be held at which representatives of many tribes would appear, it made their mission all the more difficult of accomplishment.

Even though they succeeded in rescuing little Kate, once the alarm was given how could they ever expect to elude the scores upon scores of painted savages with whom the woods would quickly be filled?

"Perhaps it may mean more delay for us, Sandy," he had said.

- "You make me groan when you say that, Bob," the other had replied.
- "Our only hope," Bob pursued, firmly, "must be to make a successful flight when we have swooped down on the wigwam of Black Beaver, and snatched our sister from the possession of the Iroquois. And, while the forest is fairly alive with enemies, what chance would we have for getting clear?"
- "Yes, I know you must be right, Bob, just as you always are," Sandy muttered. "But how can we ever stand it?"
- "Hist! Blue Jacket is holding up a warning finger again. He must smell more of the Indians coming somewhere. Lie down, Sandy, and don't even whisper till he gives the word."

Long before now Sandy had declared that it was his positive belief that their dusky guide must be able to scent the presence of Indians, because he always gave them warning so far in advance of the actual appearance of the prowlers; but Bob knew that it was from his wonderful sense of hearing that Blue Jacket thus forestalled the appearance of the Indians on their dog-trot journey; that he could catch the faintest sound, just as the long-eared rabbit

might, or the timid mink that they sought to trap for his valuable pelt.

Once more they were moving now, and it seemed to Bob that Blue Jacket must have some definite object ahead, for otherwise he certainly would not persist in pushing onward after the shades of night had fallen.

Presently he came to a stop. They were under a mighty oak tree, one of the widest spreading Bob had ever set eyes on. He saw Blue Jacket looking upward eagerly, as though interested in those great gnarled limbs that seemed to shut out the very stars of the heavens.

"Climb far up, Bob, Sandy," breathed the voice of the red guide, as he himself started to set the example.

Wonderingly the two brothers obeyed. Neither of them could just then give the slightest guess as to why Blue Jacket wished them to climb the tree. Even though the woods did seem to be full of moving red men, and the risk of discovery constant, it would appear that they might have readily found some dense thicket into which they could have crawled, and thus remain undiscovered by the enemy.

But, by this time, both of the young pioneers

had come to understand that Blue Jacket never made a move without a good reason; and Bob, in particular, felt positive that presently they would learn the meaning of this queer action.

Not until he had mounted far into the dense branches of the great oak did the young Shawanee brave halt.

"Now, sit like rock—no move—see soon what happen!" whispered the red guide, as they came to a halt.

A short time passed away. Bob was listening intently. Dimly a suspicion as to the truth was beginning to filter through his brain. He wished to verify it, and it was for this reason that he strained his ears to the limit.

Then from underneath something came to him. Sandy, too, must have heard it, for his lips sought the ear of his brother, and he whispered as softly as the sigh of the night breeze through the topmost branches of the great oak:

"Indians below!"

CHAPTER XX

PONTIAC IN THE COUNCIL

Knowing the folly of trying to enter into any sort of talk at such a time, Bob only pinched the arm of his more reckless brother. And Sandy understood what that signified; he was to say not another word.

Other sounds reached them. Bob caught the well-known click of flint and steel, and knew that a fire was about to be started. Presently sparks flashed and then the tinder caught, so that a little flame darted up.

As this was carefully fed by a practised hand it grew in volume, until the darkness that had rested under the thick branches of the great oak began to be dissipated.

By degrees Bob could make out the figures of several Indians. He stared as if unable to believe his eyes, for every one of them seemed to have vied with the others in assuming a grotesque dress. Several wore horns, and all of them had their faces hidden behind masks, usually the heads of some animal.

The first represented a wolf, one of those gaunt timber pirates that could easily pull a stag to earth; another had on a buffalo head; while a third seemed to represent a panther. Their garments were elaborately fashioned, and their persons decked with all manner of tinkling bits of metal, and colored porcupine quills. Not a movement did they make after once throwing off their reserve but that Bob was reminded of a necromancer he had once seen a very long time ago, in a playhouse in Richmond, to which his father took him at Christmas time.

He knew what these strange personages were as soon as his eyes beheld their remarkable attire and actions. Up to now Bob had never really set eyes on a real medicine man, though Sandy claimed to have done so at the time he was a prisoner in the Shawanee village.

But why half a dozen of them; and what sort of business had brought them here to this tree, that must be a land mark in the neighborhood? Did Blue Jacket know? He claimed to have been in this vicinity before; then perhaps he was acquainted with the very tree, in the branches of which they perched at that minute.

Still watching, Bob saw that the queer men

below were carrying on in a strange way as they fed the flames, and kept building up the fire. They went through all manner of gestures, flinging their arms wildly aloft, dancing as they circled the flames, throwing some sort of powder into the fire that for the moment cast a blood red and terrible glow upon everything around; and anon even taking hold of hands to engage in a wild orgy around the blaze.

By slow degrees he began to realize that these seven medicine men must belong to just as many different tribes. It was as though they had been sent here ahead in order to start the sacred fire at which, later on, the heads of those same clans would gather in solemn conclave!

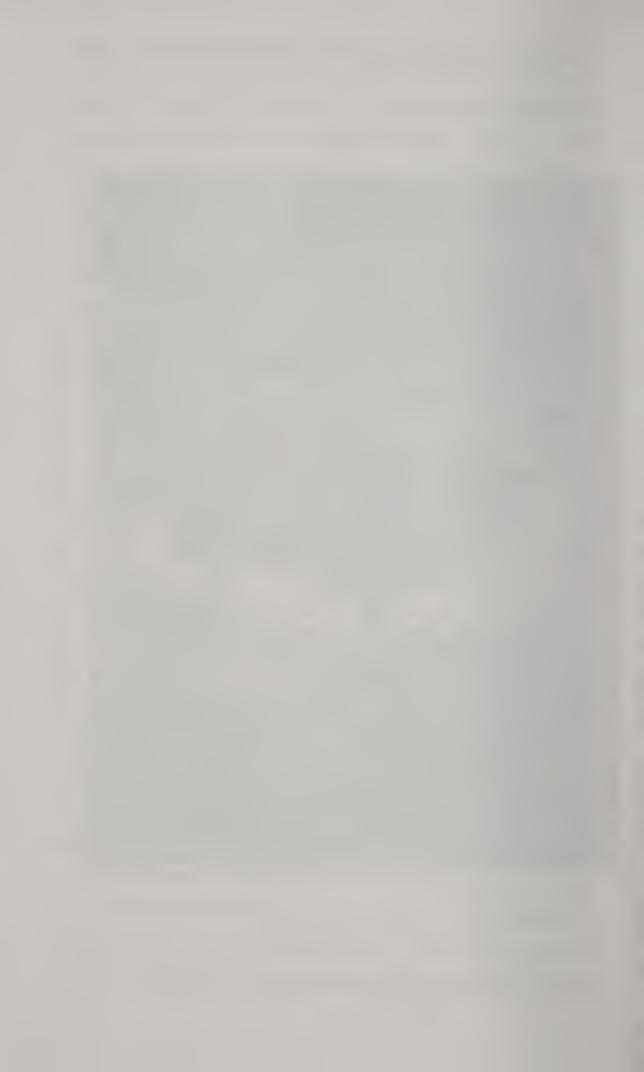
Did it mean that the idle wish of Sandy was to be thus quickly fulfilled? Had Blue Jacket in some way heard what was said, or guessed it; and was he now bent on giving them a chance to hear the coming council, when representatives of many nations would come to meet those of the Iroquois, and try to wean them away from their allegiance to the English?

The thought thrilled the young pioneer. He did not know whether to be glad or fearful because it was so. It would, of course, be a wonderful thing for them to see this council which



"DANCING AS THEY CIRCLED THE FLAMES"

Flein



must go down in history; to perhaps look upon the great Pontiac, as well as the head chiefs connected with many powerful tribes, such as the Sacs, the Foxes, the Senecas, the Onondagas, the Mohawks and the war-like Delawares. But what if, through some little misfortune, they were discovered?

While Bob was giving way to these thoughts he saw that the queer dance below had come to an end. The strangely garbed medicine men vanished from view, and other Indians began to troop in to gather about the fire.

By dozens and scores they came from every quarter. Bob could hardly believe he was not dreaming, for the great space below began to be fairly packed with Indians. Some stalked around in their skin blankets, while others were naked down to the waist.

These latter were the wild Ojibways, with quivers slung at their backs, and light war clubs resting in the hollow of their arms. There were Ottawas wrapped close in gaudy blankets, and Wyandots fluttering in painted shirts, their heads adorned with colored feathers, and their leggins garnished with shining metal discs that often chimed like silver bells.

He knew that he was undoubtedly looking

upon the most noted chiefs west of the mountains. Some of these must be men who had led in the wars of the last few years, where scores and hundreds of lives had been lost.

Afterwards he learned from Blue Jacket that the Shawanee sachem Silver Heels was present, as well as Sagan the Cuyuga chieftain, later on the terror of the settlers; and that the young fellow who dressed much like a white man was really Joseph Brant, the adopted son of Sir William Johnson, and later renowned as Thayendanega, the Mohawk scourge of the American settlements; while others were Turtle Heart, old Bald Eagle, and Longboat of the Delawares.

Now the assembled Indians began to seat themselves cross-legged around the council fire. It was easy to believe that the inner circle must be made up of those in whose hands lay the most power. Nor were they all Indians. Here and there among the motley throng the watchers above had glimpsed a white man, usually a French Canadian trapper or trader. These men's sympathies were all with the war Pontiac was waging upon the venturesome English, who had pushed their outposts so far in the direction of the Mississippi.

Bob started when he recognized two familiar faces among those below; these were no other than Armand Lecroix, the leader of the men with whom the Armstrong boys had quarrelled at the time the dispute arose concerning the ownership of the game; and another fellow equally as brutal in his ways, Jacques Larue, with whom Bob and Sandy had had trouble in the past.

It was not surprise at seeing these men here among the hostile Indians that gave Bob that chilly feeling. He was only thinking how pleased the French trappers would be if they discovered how the grand council was being spied upon, and who the unfortunates in the tree-top proved to be.

Looking closer, Bob felt positive he could recognize Pontiac. The most notorious Indian of history, whose one dream it had ever been to unite the many tribes into a confederacy, and then sweep the hated palefaces back into the ocean from which they had sprung, was a notable figure.

His manner was commanding, and even his garb bespoke the kingly role he had taken upon himself. He was not above middle height, though his figure was commanding. His com-

plexion was darker than is usual with his race, and his features had a bold and stern expression, while his bearing was that of a man accustomed to sweeping away all opposition by the force of his imperious will.

Ordinarily Pontiac's attire was that of the primitive savage, girded about the loins, wearing beaded moccasins, and with his long black hair flowing loosely; but, when seated in council, he was wont to appear as Bob and Sandy now gazed in awe upon him, plumed and painted in the full costume of war.

Every eye was fastened upon Pontiac when he spoke, after the pipe had been passed around, and each member of the council had taken a whiff, sending a little puff toward each point of the compass.

Although the voice of the great sachem reached them easily, neither of the boys could understand what he said, as he made his passionate appeal to the chiefs of the Six Nations and many others assembled there. It was easy however for them to guess that he was artfully appealing to their passions and prejudices, and telling them how, if only all the red tribes would join together, they could once again possess the land that their fathers had owned.

Then others spoke, some apparently in favor of the proposal of the great leader, others counselling caution. Thus time passed until a full hour had gone. The boys had not dared even move all this while, though they felt stiff and sore from so long perching upon the hard limbs. Screened by the leaves that still clung to the branches of the council oak, they had seen one after another get up to give his views upon the subject Pontiac had brought as a message from his powerful tribe that had its home along the border of the other Great Lakes, where Detroit and similar frontier posts held out against the attacks of the allied Indians.

No eye was strong enough to pierce the screen that hid the three spies. Doubtless all of those below found enough to interest them in watching the play of passion, or entreaty, upon the faces of the speakers, without allowing their gaze to roam elsewhere. Most of all would they fail to glance up amid the foliage of the oak, where only a lynx or a wolverine might be expected to lurk, if indeed any living thing could be found there.

Sandy wished with all his heart that it were over. He had seen enough, and was fairly wild to get relief from his cramped position. Pontiac, after all, while possibly a wonderful man, might pall upon one!

There was one event, however, that broke up the monotony of hearing those speeches in a tongue which they could not understand. This happened when the fiery Jacques Larue arose to his feet, and launched into a violent talk in the Indian language, which he seemed to understand as well as though he had been born a red man.

He apparently differed from the line of argument that the great sachem Pontiac had advanced, for he frequently turned toward that individual, and seemed to shake his hand almost threateningly.

Whatever it may have been that stood between them, Bob knew well that it had no concern regarding the scheme to clean out the pioneer settlements along the Great Lakes and the Ohio River. Like all his breed, Larue would have welcomed such a catastrophe, could it be brought about.

Perhaps his suspicions had been aroused, and he believed that this vast plot of Pontiac embraced the French as well as the English — that, after the latter had been wiped out, the red hosts, flushed with victory, were to turn

upon their supporters, and finish the French also.

History tells us that Pontiac was suspected of harboring such a scheme, and only accepted the help of the French trappers and traders in order to lull them into a condition of fancied security.

There was a sudden break in the harangue of Jacques Larue when Pontiac, as if stung beyond all control, sprang to his feet and struck the excited French trapper full in the face.

A terrible moment of silence followed. Fully fifty dusky hands sought tomahawks and knives as the assemblage watched to see what the several companions of Larue would do to avenge the open insult. One move would have sealed their death, and those men knew it only too well.

Face to face Pontiac and the French trapper stood, with eye glaring into eye. Then with a contemptuous laugh the chief made a movement with his imperious hand, as if ordering Larue to get out of his sight before he gave the signal for him to be cut to pieces.

There was nothing for it but to obey, since Larue knew only too well that he had few friends among all that assemblage. Not one would dare lift a hand against the dusky idol of the Indian tribes, the silver-tongued and powerful sachem of the Pottawottomies.

He slunk away, and vanished beyond the outer circles; but that last frown which he bent on Pontiac told only too plainly what hatred and bitter venom was hidden in his black heart.

Nor did either of the watching and listening white boys imagine for a moment what a tremendous influence that very dramatic circumstance was fated to have upon their own fortunes. And still it was so.

The great council, held under the famous oak where many such had taken place in the years that were gone, broke up at last. The final speech had been delivered by Pontiac himself; and once more his wonderfully persuading voice seemed to be raised in pleading. The Iroquois chiefs had been divided, as near as Bob could make out, some being in favor of joining the tremendous chain of confederated tribes, while others clung to their well-known allegiance to the English.

Now the immense crowd had begun to melt away. By dozens and scores the Indians took themselves off, each tribe seeming to cling together. Pontiac himself, Bob noticed, seemed to accompany an old and wise-looking chief who, from his dress, he believed must be the famous Delaware sachem, Bald Eagle; and with them, too, was the Seneca chieftain.

In ten minutes not an Indian was to be seen below. The fire had burned down, and was slowly dying out. Sandy would have tried to make a move in order to at least change his position, only that his brother nudged him, and in this way warned the impatient one that they had not yet seen the end of the affair.

Figures were again moving under the sacred council oak tree. Once more did the seven strange figures of the allied medicine men appear, to again exhort the Great Spirit to listen to the appeals that had so recently been spoken. They danced around the dying fire, they chanted in unison, they waved their arms, and rattled hollow gourds that contained hard seeds, until the effect was most awe-inspiring.

Finally, as a fitting wind-up to these queer proceedings that seemed to partake of the savage nature of the Indian, each of them tossed a handful of powder in the embers of the fire. For the second time that red flame arose, to bathe the entire vicinity in its fierce glow, and to avoid which the watchers aloft had need to close their aching eyes.

When they opened them again the seven medicine men had vanished, gliding away as silently as ghosts. Only the dying fire lay below to tell them of the wonderful experience which they had just passed through, thanks to the sagacity and daring of their faithful guide, Blue Jacket.

There was no further use trying to restrain Sandy. He saw that the coast below was clear, and felt that no Indian would dare profane the sacred meeting-place after the medicine men had thus consecrated it anew.

Nor did Blue Jacket attempt to stop him. They certainly could not remain where they were; and, since the Seneca village could not be a great distance off, it might be well for them to try to find it.

As Bob knew, it was the intention of their dusky friend to enter, when they had discovered the wigwams of the tribe to which the abductor of little Kate belonged. He could play the part of a messenger from the south, sent to learn more about the plans of Pontiac, so that the ever hostile Shawanees might be able to work in common with the rest of the tribes.

Once within the borders of the big village it would be easy for Blue Jacket to discover

whether Black Beaver had returned, and, if so, what manner of prisoner he had brought with him.

After that they could lay their heads together, to fashion a plan by means of which the girl might be spirited away.

Once on the ground Sandy began to stretch himself vigorously. Nearly two hours of confinement, without being allowed to move much of the time, had apparently tied his young muscles in knots, so that they actually pained him.

"I'm glad to be able to put up my hands again, I tell you," Sandy remarked, as he thus stretched his limbs, and drew in huge breaths, as though he had not been allowed to use his lungs properly for fear lest he thus betray their place of concealment to the watchful enemy below.

Bob was himself feeling much better since allowed to leave that hard perch in the thickest part of the giant oak. He would have so expressed himself, no doubt, only that he was given no opportunity. Even as he opened his mouth to reply to his brother, a gruff voice broke in upon them from the rear, saying:

"Zat is ver' goot, begar! Suppose, then,

young monsieur continue to elevate ze hands, and so it vill not tempt me to shoot. If so be I must press zis trigger of ze gun, poof! it vill be ovaire so quick wif you all. Stand still, or ze consequences be on your own heads!"

Bob felt a cold chill as he listened to these scoffing words. He recognized the voice as belonging to Armand Lacroix, the French trapper who had given him such a look of hatred at the time there was a dispute between them as to whom the game belonged, and which was settled in favor of the young pioneer.

CHAPTER XXI

PRISONERS

- "STEADY, Sandy!"
- "But, Bob, must we just stand here, and let them take us prisoners?" asked the younger brother, in an agonized voice.
- "We can do nothing to help ourselves just now," Bob went on, in a singularly calm tone, because, you see, there are four of them; and each man has a gun pointed at us. We must try to kill time, hoping that Blue Jacket may bring us help in some way."
- "Blue Jacket where is he?" asked Sandy, wonderingly.
- "I do not know," replied Bob. "He disappeared like a shadow. I think he must have heard the breathing of these men as they came along, and, knowing that it was too late to cry out a warning to us, he just melted away, as is his habit."
- "Will he desert us, then?" asked Sandy, with a trace of bitterness in his voice.
 - "Impossible," answered his brother. "We

ought to know Blue Jacket better than to think that of him. Forget all about him just now, and perhaps, if things come to the worst, he may show his hand."

"What for you say zat, young monsieur?" demanded the leering Lacroix. "Haf you zen a compadre near by? Zen it vill not be good for him to come back. Ve vill engage to make a prisoner of heem just as ve haf of you. Drop ze guns, both of you!"

Bob instantly obeyed. He would have resisted to the last gasp if there had been any chance, however slight; but, when four guns were bearing on them, with the owners not more than ten feet away, it would have been foolhardy to refuse to carry out the order of the lawless French trapper.

Besides, he somehow fancied that the others would have preferred a defiant attitude on their part, since it would give them a reasonable excuse to shoot.

Sandy, seeing that his brother had in this way acknowledged their case to be apparently hopeless, also cast his faithful old musket from him. Seldom had it ever missed fire, and he was accustomed to depending on it when in sore need; but just then it could only invite

the coming of quick death, if he so much as tried to draw the hammer back.

The stalwart woodranger of course noted this unhappy manner of Sandy. It seemed to rather please him, since the shoe was now on the other foot, and he had the whip-hand of the young pioneers.

"Ze leetle cub, he not like eet ver' much," he chuckled. "But it is ze fortunes of war, monsieur, and you must bend ze neck to ze sword. Ve haf you in ze hole and zis game eet ees in our hands. Now, tell me if you please, vat brings you up to zis country, so far avay from ze happy cabin on ze Ohio, la belle river?"

Neither of the boys replied, Sandy because he was too angry to speak, and Bob on account of wanting to gather his wits first, before committing himself. To tell these enemies about Kate would be weakening their case. Should they escape from the clutches of the four Frenchmen, the chances were that Lacroix would warn Black Beaver that the brothers of his captive had come to rescue her and a trap might be laid into which they would fall.

"Ze astonishment of ze matter almost strike me dumb," continued the other, who seldom knew when to stop talking, once he started.

"To zink zat zese leetle boys of ze Eenglish should hide zemselves in zat sacred oak, and hear all zat was said at ze grand council! It ees marvel! It is superb! I am not agree in my mind whether ve ought to visit ze punishment on zere heads ourselves, Monsieur Larue, or take zem to ze Indians for to run ze gauntlet, and burn at ze stake!"

Sandy shook his head. It was as much as to tell the speaker that if he were carrying on this style of talk simply to frighten the two undaunted lads, he might as well save his breath.

At this moment the other leader among the trappers took a turn in the conversation, which up to now had been monopolized by Lacroix.

- "I haf von idea, Armand, my friend," he observed, looking very wise.
- "Zat is ver' well; but suppose you share ze same wif us all!" Lacroix cried, as he pressed his cheek against the butt of his heavy gun, after the manner of a man who longed to pull trigger and do fell execution.
- "You seem to think," Larue continued, "ze young cubs zey come avay up to zis far country just to climb in zat tree, and listen to ze great Pontiac talk. Parbleau! zat is all wrong, I assure you on my honor. Look back, my

friend, and perhaps you vill remember zat when ve lodged in ze great town of ze Senecas zere came into the same a young chief who bring wif heem a prisoner!"

Bob started, and bit his lips until the blood came. Without meaning to do the brothers a good turn Larue was about to make a disclosure that would do away with uncertainty concerning the whereabouts of the stolen Kate.

"Oui, I remember ze same, ver' well," said Armand; "but what may zat haf to do wif our young friends here? Haf zey lost some one from zere family? Was zat girl belong to zem, I would like to know?"

Jacques Larue nodded his head violently.

"At ze time somezings seem to say to me zat somewhere haf I seen ze pretty face of ze leetle one. Now I know. She is ze seester of ze Armstrong boys. From her home haf she been carry by ze young chief, who fancy her face, because he lose heem own seester not so long ago. And so, behold, do zese brave boys come all zis way to rescue ze Kate. Is it not grant? Alas! to zink zey fall themselves into ze power of ze savages, and be made to burn at ze stake. Zat is sad!"

He pretended to look mournful as he said

this; but there was an old score to be settled between Jacques and the young pioneers, and Bob was not deceived in the least by this mockery of sympathy.

Back in those sparkling orbs he could see the wicked delight that filled the soul of Larue at this unexpected pleasure. For the moment even the insult, put upon him by the great Pontiac in the presence of scores of chiefs and warriors, was almost forgotten.

Nor was Armand Lacroix more to be depended on. He might, down in his heart, feel something like admiration for the grit shown by the lads in thus venturing into a hostile country in order to serve their loved sister. That feeling, however, would be utterly superceded by his joy at having a chance to vent his evil spite upon the boy who had held him up at the muzzle of his gun, and made him a laughing stock for Simon Kenton and his fellow borderers.

"Sacre! vat shall be done wiz zem?" demanded Lacroix, half lowering his levelled rifle; for, since the boys had cast away their weapons, they could hardly be deemed dangerous, especially since there were two men to each lad.

"It was a clever idea you haf, Armand, to

come back to ze sacred oak, where ze Indians, you say, would nevaire interrupt us, for a talk. Only for zat we would not haf ze pleasure of meeting our young friends. You ask what sall we do wif zem? Eef I haf my way, I say, turn zem loose and zen give each twenty paces to run, after wich we would fire. I haf drive ze head of a nail at more zan zat."

"Ze idea heem not haf bad, Jacques; but, after all, what could equal ze pleasure of turning zese two bold trailers over to ze Pottawottomies wif Pontiac. Zey know how to torture ze foe. Zey haf long experience. Eet is no business of ours how zey put ze prisoner to death; zey are our allies, and we cannot let escape zose who carry ze great secret of ze council."

Bob knew the character of these half-savage French trappers. He believed they were on a par with the renegade white man whom he had heard utter such bitter words at the council fire, and whom he fancied must be the notorious Simon Girty, himself. Had it been his own life that was in peril, Bob would have refused to make any sort of appeal to the lawless trappers; but, for the sake of little Kate, he felt that he must lower his pride to plead with them.

"Lacroix and Larue," he said, slowly, and with an earnestness in his manner that chained their attention; "for myself I would scorn to plead; but, because of the poor child who is at this hour a prisoner in the Iroquois village, I ask you to let us go free. Her poor mother's heart is nearly broken, and if Kate never comes back, it will surely give way. If you would only let us go, so that we might try to set her free, we give you our solemn promise that we will deliver ourselves up to you again, if we survive, so that you can do what you will."

The two Frenchmen exchanged glances. They could not but be influenced by the brave words of the half-grown lad. At the same time, they had too long led utterly wicked lives to allow themselves to be tempted to do the right thing now.

"Listen to zat, would you, Larue?" said Armand, with a sneer. "Ze cub wants us to let him go free zis time. He even promises zat he will call heemself our prisoner at any time in ze future, eef he lives. It is to laugh. I haf always believe ze bird in ze hand is much better zan two in ze bush. How ees it, Jacques, shall we bow ze young monsieur and hees brother off ze premises, or turn zem over to ze sav-

ages, to run ze gantlet, and afford much sport?"

"Our duty eet is plain, Armand," the second Frenchman remarked, with a chuckle; "we dare not play double wif our allies. Zey would turn on us and poof! zat would be ze end of everyzing. No, it must be zat we make ze prisoner, and march ze cubs in to ze Iroquois town to be punished as spies."

"Oh!" said Sandy, unable to entirely keep quiet, with his pulses beating like a furious trip-hammer.

"Stand still, Sandy!" said Bob in a low tone, fearing that his impulsive brother was about to take desperate chances in leaping at the four French trappers; "all may not yet be lost. Hold hard for just another minute, I beg of you!"

Something in Bob's tone gave Sandy a new lease of life. It was as though he had made a discovery that meant hope. And this was, indeed, what had happened, for, just five seconds before, Bob had seen a head suddenly raised above the surrounding bushes; and even in the dull light of the dying fire he believed that he had recognized the well known features of Pat O'Mara!

CHAPTER XXII

THE TABLES TURNED

FORTUNATELY Bob understood what part he ought to take in the turning of the tables on the quartette of Frenchmen. If he could only hold their attention for a brief time, Pat O'Mara might creep up close enough to spring his surprise.

That one glimpse which Bob had taken had shown him another thing; the Irish frontiersman was not alone! In several other places the bushes were waving slightly, proclaiming that others must also be advancing cautiously toward the council oak.

He knew not whom they might be, and, beyond the possibility of Blue Jacket constituting one of the number, could not even guess who were Pat's comrades. But it was positive that they must be friends, else they would not be up here along the border of the Great Lakes, spying upon the grand council of the tribes in league with that trouble-maker, Pontiac.

And so wise Bob immediately set to work to

hold the attention of Larue and his three companions. Seconds would count just then, since their friends were crawling closer and closer all the time.

"Wait for a minute, please, gentlemen all!" he cried, holding up a hand, as he saw Armand take a step forward, doubtless eager to bind with deerskin thongs the lads he hated so bitterly.

There was something about Bob's manner to arouse their curiosity. Besides, they knew no reason why they should wish to hurry. The Indians dared not return again to the vicinity of the sacred council oak, after the medicine men had conducted their closing exercises under its wide spreading branches; time must elapse before the spell which had been placed on the tree would have exhausted its charm. Hence there seemed to be no danger of interruption.

Besides, they fancied playing with their prisoners, somewhat as a cat does with a mouse, enjoying, in anticipation, the feast to come.

"What is eet ze young monsieur would say to us?" asked Larue, making a mock bow, as though he could not forget the manners of a polite Frenchman even in the midst of war's alarms.

"Perhaps we might be able to give you much valuable information in return for a favor!" said Bob, trying to fill his manner with mystery, so as to further excite the curiosity of the border adventurers, always eager for gain.

He saw that they began to show some interest; for Jacques and Armand exchanged glances, with raised eyebrows. It was as if one said to his comrade: "Shall we listen to what he has to say?" and the other by a nod announced that it would be as well, since they had nothing to lose.

"Bob, what would you do?" gasped the horrified Sandy, actually believing that, in his despair, his brother meant to reveal some weakness in the defences of the white settlers, or betray the secret code by which they expected to summon assistance in time of need.

"Be still!" hissed Bob, between his teeth, for he saw figures creeping closer, making no more noise than so many snakes might have done; and Sandy, utterly confounded by this strange attitude of the other, shrank back appalled, fearing lest Bob had indeed lost his mind.

"Listen for a minute to me, Lacroix," the young pioneer went on, as he held the attention of the four men. "Perhaps I could tell you where much of this same precious ore might be found. Look well at it, and say whether or not it is true gold!"

He had taken something from his pocket, and now tossed it across to the nearest man, who chanced to be Armand. The latter dextrously caught the object, which he immediately began to examine with the eyes of greed.

"Throw some small wood on ze fire, so that I may haf more light!" he exclaimed; "and ze rest of you keep an eye on ze young cubs zat zey do not run away. Sacre! can I belief my eyes? What is zis I see?"

Sandy caught his breath. For the first time there flashed through his mind something of the truth with regard to Bob's sudden inspiration. He realized that his shrewd brother must be fighting for time.

That little piece of ore containing the sparkling gold grains had often lain in his own palm, for Bob had carried it many years. Originally it had come from the mountains of North Carolina, where some of the settlers were engaged in a crude method of mining in the streams and rocky gullies. A returned Virginian, who had gone there to nurse his sick brother, brought some of these specimens with him, and one had been given to Bob.

And now it was playing the great part for which perhaps it had so long been reposing in the pocket of the young pioneer.

Meantime Larue, having caught up a handful of fine wood, and cast the same upon the smouldering council fire, so that it flamed again briefly, hastened to lean over the shoulder of his shorter comrade. His hungry eyes feasted upon the glittering object which Armand held in the hollow of his hand.

- "Can it be posseeble zat it ees real gold?" he asked, with a quiver of greed in his harsh voice.
- "Take eet and see, Jacques," replied the other, thrusting the object upon his companion, as though eager to have his own opinion verified.

Immediately the other, having examined the bit of ore, about which there could be no possible doubt, raised his bloodshot eyes, and surveyed Bob almost fiercely. And the boy knew then and there that his trap had worked; for he had chained the attention of the four French-

men, while closer and closer crept those who were coming through the bushes toward the opening.

- "Haf you more of ze same stuff?" demanded Jules.
- "Not here," replied Bob, coolly. "I would not be apt to carry it along with me when starting out on such an expedition as this. But I give you my word I can tell you where it comes from, and where much more of it lies, waiting to be picked up."

The covetous eyes of the crafty pair sought each other; and then the two exchanged nods. They had swallowed the bait, gorged it in fact; but Bob knew that he must try to prevent their feeling the hook until he was ready to strike.

"What is zis you tell us, hey?" Larue continued craftily. "Zat if we let you go free, you take us to ze place where we can peek up much of zis same yellow sand in ze rock? But how we know you keep your word? S'pose we hold one like hostage till time come zat you carry out promise?"

Bob turned to his brother, at the same time giving him a sly wink.

"What say you to that, Sandy?" he asked.

"Would you agree to stay with Larue and his friends while I carry out our little plan; and then, later on, they would set you free, after I had led them to where they might find more of this?"

And Sandy, beginning to realize the value of passing seconds, pretended to carefully weigh the importance of the proposition before replying. Finally, after the Frenchmen had begun to move restlessly, as they kept their eager eyes fastened on him, Sandy nodded his head.

"Whatever you think best, that will I do, Bob?" he said, slowly.

"Zat is well, young monsieur," chuckled Jacques, rubbing his hands together, as if greatly pleased. "Parbleu! it may be zat we shall yet be able to make arrangements satisfactory to both. If you rescue ze young ma'mselle, we are to be told ze secret; if, on ze uzzer hand, you fail, still ze one who is wiz us shall lead us to ze fine mine. It ees a bargain!"

So delighted were the four men over the prospect, that those who were supposed to be watching the boys allowed their rifles to sag a bit. Bob was running a hand through the pockets of his clothes, as though eagerly searching for something else, and of course every eye was riveted on his movements; which was the very object he had in mind.

Suddenly, and without the slightest warning, there was a rush of feet. The four French trappers whirled about with the intention of putting up a stout resistance, but it was too late. They had been caught napping!

The guns were torn from their grasp, and hurled to the ground. Instantly they found themselves staring into dark muzzles of guns held in steady hands, while back of these weapons appeared the faces of Simon Kenton, Pat O'Mara and one other woodranger. Nor was Blue Jacket missing, for he stood in plain sight, with an arrow fitted to his bowstring, and drawn nearly to the flint barb, as he aimed straight at the heart of Larue.

"Make the slightest noise, and you shall surely die!" exclaimed Kenton, in a stern voice, that had its effect upon all the Frenchmen.

Meanwhile Bob and Sandy had taken advantage of the opening to leap forward and recover their own weapons, which were instantly levelled at their enemies. Thus encompassed on all sides it was little wonder that the French

trappers were ready to throw up their hands, and admit defeat.

"History has a way of repeating itself, Lacroix," said Kenton, with a laugh, as he started to bind the hands of the borderman with tested thongs made from the toughest of elk hide. "Once before I had the pleasure of stopping your little game when you would oppress these two boys. Mark well what I say, for the next time you raise a hand against them, the crack of a rifle will seal your doom! Two warnings spell the end."

"But what would you do wiz us?" demanded Larue, as he saw that each of his companions was being triced up in the same fashion as himself; since Pat and the remaining scout were experts in the art of applying bonds.

"That we do not know just yet," returned the borderer. "But, if you accept your capture as the fortunes of war, and do not try to escape, there will be no harm befall you."

Bob and Sandy were no longer filled with despair. Like magic their condition had changed. Instead of being prisoners in the hands of these cruel French trappers, and threatened with the fate that so often came upon those falling into

the hands of the warring Indians, they were once more free.

Better still, they had found good friends in Kenton, Pat O'Mara and the third scout, so that the chances of their daring mission being carried out were more favorable than ever.

"Pat has told us about the trouble that has come upon you, Bob," Kenton said, as he shook hands with each of the boys in turn. "And we all feel for you. Our object in coming here has now been accomplished, since we have listened at a distance to what Pontiac said to the chiefs at the grand powwow here. If we can help you rescue little Kate, we stand ready to lend a hand."

Sandy's face fairly beamed with joy. As we know, he entertained a feeling bordering on worship for the gallant young woodsman, Simon Kenton, who in his opinion was a greater hero than Colonel Boone himself. What Kenton said, therefore, counted heavily with Sandy; and, when the reckless borderer thus gave his promise to assist them in their work, the boy believed success was assured.

Not so Bob, who was accustomed to weighing things more seriously before making up his mind. He knew of the countless difficulties they would have to meet, both before they effected the rescue of Kate, and afterward, when the whole country near the Great Lakes would be overrun with savage hordes, searching for the palefaces who had dared invade their territory, and even enter the great village of that most noted of Seneca chiefs, Kiashuta, the war leader, who had just made a new blood compact with Pontiac.

Still, it was good to look on the faces of these three valiant hunters, and realize that no longer were two weak boys pitting their strength and knowledge of Indian tactics against the cunning of the Iroquois.

Bob did not fail to shake the hand of his friend, Blue Jacket, who must have run across the three borderers soon after he slipped away at the coming of the hostile Frenchmen.

Thus they now counted six stout souls, united in the determination to accomplish the object of the long journey, and bring little Kate back to the arms of the fond mother, mourning on the bank of the far-distant Ohio.

To the hands of Simon Kenton willingly did Bob resign his cause, firm in the belief that, if any mortal could carry it to success, the bold borderer would.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CAVERN OF THE WATER SPIRITS

- "We must get away from here right soon," announced Kenton, after he had asked the boys a few questions concerning the adventures that had been met with on the long and dangerous journey across country from the Ohio to the region of the Great Lakes.
- "Whatever you say, we will do only too gladly," declared Bob; and Sandy nodded his head eagerly, to denote that he was of the same mind.
- "Very good," remarked the borderer, who had been thinking over matters even at the time he questioned the boys. "And, as it happens, we know of a fine hiding-place not a great way off, where we can keep these fellows safe during the time we must stay around the Seneca town."
- "Troth!" remarked Pat O'Mara, immediately; "'tis a jewel av a place. They till me they have kept house in the same both toimes whin comin' up till the country av the Great

Lakes, to say phat the crafty ould sarpint Kiashuta might be about. By the greatest luck in the worrld I ran acrost Abijah Cook here, and was introjuced to the cavern. 'Tis a grand place I'm tilling ye, me boys; and bad cess to the ridskin that iver discovers the same.'

"Come, let us depart without any more delay," said Kenton, impatiently; for he knew that there was more or less danger lest one of the medicine men find some excuse to return to the sacred oak, and thus make a discovery that must cause the Seneca village to buzz like an enormous hive of bees, with scores of warriors rushing forth to scour the whole neighborhood for signs of the bold palefaces.

The four Frenchmen evidently did not enjoy the prospect by which they were confronted. Still, they were soldiers of fortune enough to accept things as they came along. Who could tell what the next shuffle of the cards might bring forth? The first often became last, and the under dog might find himself in a position to make terms as victor.

That their air of indifference was assumed even the boys felt sure. They could detect the cautious looks cast around by the leaders of the

Frenchmen, and understood how eagerly they would seize upon a chance to escape.

Nor were the three white men in doubt as to what such a catastrophe might mean for them; since it must bring a mob of cruel foes howling at their heels like a pack of timber wolves eager for the blood of the wounded stag.

Quitting the wonderful oak that had, perhaps, witnessed these strange councils of the red men for centuries past, all plunged into the forest.

The French trappers were fastened together with a hide rope which Kenton happened to have wrapped about his waist.

Guarded by men with ready rifles, and followed by the two boys and Blue Jacket, the prisoners knew they would show their good sense by refraining from any demonstration.

Crafty Larue might have sought to delay the march by pretended stumbles, but he did not exactly like the manner of Kenton. Possibly he knew something of the fiery nature of the rash borderer, and feared to arouse his anger.

As they thus threaded the mazes of the deep woods, winding in and out while following certain trails made doubtless by wild animals, not a word was spoken. Kenton had warned the prisoners that talking would not be allowed under any circumstances.

He himself wished to ask a score of important questions of the boys, knowing that, since they had been hidden in the oak tree during the holding of the great palaver, they must know much that he yearned to grasp. But he could wait until they were in a position of safety before making his inquiries.

"I hope we are nearly there," whispered Sandy in the ear of his brother, for, to tell the truth, the boy was nearly exhausted after the great strain of the last week, and then those two long hours up in the tree, when he could hardly breathe freely, for fear of betraying their hiding-place to the watchful enemy.

Pat O'Mara was close enough to catch the low words, or else he guessed what Sandy must have said. At any rate, he dropped back a pace or two, and managed to remark in his genial, consoling way:

"Whist now, be aisy, me boy; 'twill not be long afore we reach our distination. And thin, by the powers, ye can rist as long as ye plaise. Do be lookin' out that ye lave the trees alone, and save the skin av your nose," he added, as Sandy, forgetting to be as careful as usual, in

his desire to hear what Pat had to say, ran full into a sapling that he failed to see in time, and consequently suffered to the extent of several scratches on his face.

It was almost marvellous the way those forest rangers managed to pass in and out of the dense forest like so many shuttles in the hands of an expert weaver. The moon was utterly missing now, and even the light of the stars failed to penetrate beneath that thick canopy of matted branches overhead, so that they stalked along in almost complete darkness.

But they were at home under such conditions. The woods were an open book to Kenton. He read the pages as readily as any Indian who ever crouched in the war-dance, or lifted his voice in the whoop of a foray. They used to say that Kenton possessed the eyes of a cat, so that he could see when other men were blind. And perhaps they were right, for he certainly led his little troop in and out with marvellous skill.

Some ten minutes later Bob heard the music of a waterfall ahead.

"Phat do yees think av that?" asked Pat O'Mara a moment later, as they stood on the bank of a fairly large stream, and looked up at

the sheet of water that shot over the ledge above, to fall in a white tumbling mass into the pool at their feet.

"It is beautiful," observed Bob, who, however was wise enough to know that Kenton would not have brought them hither simply to admire the cataract.

"Back of that sheet of water there is a cavern," said the leader, as they stood on the shore. "I have been many times to the great Niagara, and a friendly Onondaga chief took me back to the wonderful shelf of rock that is hidden by that wall of falling water. So I suspected that there might be just such a fine hiding-place here. Many months ago, when I was up in this country on a mission for Governor Dunmore of Virginia, I investigated, and found it to be true. Follow after me and you shall see."

The four prisoners held back. They did not like the idea of braving the wrath of those descending waters. Perhaps there may have been some superstitious fear connected with their hesitancy, for the Indians had legends concerning this same cataract, and believed that the spirits of the departed came hither, to sing again the war chants and songs of love that they had known when on earth.

But there was nothing left for the Frenchmen to do but obey, when those grim keepers urged them on. Life was sweet, even to such reckless rovers, and so, overcoming their reluctance, they obeyed the directions given, and passed in safety behind the sparkling, water curtain.

"Keep against the rock, all!" said Kenton, who was in the lead.

Sandy stumbled; but, as usual, Bob was quick to throw out a helping hand, so that the other was saved a plunge over the edge of the rock, which must have resulted in a good ducking, if nothing more serious.

"Now stand still," came the voice of their leader from a point close at hand. "I have torches handy, and, as soon as I can get at my tinder, you shall have light."

Presently, as they stood patiently waiting, holding on to the prisoners lest they be tempted to make a dash for liberty in the dark, they heard Kenton striking his flint against the steel. Then a tiny blaze sprang up, which in turn was communicated to a long splinter of fat pine, taken from a tree, they afterwards learned, that had been lately riven by a thunderbolt, and hence was scrupulously avoided by the Indians.

When the torch lighted up the cavern the

boys found that, owing to the formation of the rocks, it was next to impossible for any one outside to see signs of human occupancy. Besides, should a Seneca warrior discover a strange weird glow behind the water curtain, he would very likely fall on his face in the full belief that the spirits were holding council there, and that the fire was not of this world, but from the land of the great Manitou.

"Here you can rest, my brave boys," said Kenton, kindly. "We have plenty of meat, and there is no lack of fuel. The smoke of the fire escapes through crevices in the rocks above. See, yonder are beds of leaves and stripped hemlock. After we have eaten, and you have told me what you heard while hidden in the oak, you must lie down to rest. As to the rescue of Kate, we will make our plans later."

A fire was soon started, the same supply of pine wood doing service. And, under such singular conditions, the two young pioneers ate the first good meal they had enjoyed for more than a week.

Afterwards Bob sat beside Kenton while the borderer plied him with many questions. Of course Bob was not always able to give as intelligent an answer as he would like, since his

ignorance of the Indian tongue had prevented his understanding much that had been said by Pontiac and the other head chiefs during the council; but Kenton, in his customary shrewd way, managed to guess at what was lacking.

"It is all plain to me, Bob," he said, later on. "Pontiac is at his old game, and hopes to weld all the various tribes from the Alleghanies to the Mississippi in a grand confederation in favor of the French, whom he loves, and against the English colonists, whom he despises. The Sacs, his own people, the Pottawottomies; the Foxes; the Delawares; even the Illinois tribes he is sure of; also the Shawanees. He longs to add the Six Nations, or Iroquois, to the list. That is why his silver voice is heard in the land of the Senecas," he added bitterly.

"But the Iroquois are the friends of the English? "Bob exclaimed.

"Yes," Kenton went on, a frown mantling his fine face. "They have been, in the past; but the artful French have long tried to undermine this old established friendship. They constantly seek opportunities to make the Onondagas, the Oneidas, the Mohawks, the Cayugas, the Tuscaroras, and the Senecas believe that the English governor of Virginia is playing

them false, and speaking with a double tongue."

- "But they have not wavered, up to now," said Bob. "Surely they hate the French so much that they will refuse to join with them in warring on our settlements, just because the lilies of France seek to run a line of trading posts all the way down the Mississippi?"
- "We believe that is true with most of the tribes; but the Senecas have acted in a suspicious way," returned the borderer. "That is why we two came up to this northern country. News reached Boone that Pontiac was sending his wampum belt to the Seneca chief, Kiashuta, with word that the owner expected to personally follow it up, and address a great gathering of the various tribes under the famous Seneca council oak."
- "If that was Kiashuta with whom Pontiac departed, I greatly fear he is leaning toward the teaching of the great plotter," Bob declared.
- "Yes, he has little love for the English, the more the pity," Kenton added; "but, left to himself, the Seneca would have been swayed by his fellow chiefs of the Six Nations. Now that he has heard the fiery, persuading voice of

Pontiac, I fear he, too, will be ready to dig up the hatchet that has been buried these many years, and go with his young braves on the warpath, burning and slaying."

Sandy had already thrown himself down on some of the hemlock boughs, and was far gone on the road to slumberland. The warmth of the cavern, together with his more satisfied mind, and the good supper of which he had just partaken, combined to make the lad very sleepy.

Nor was Bob averse to following his example when he found that Kenton had no more important questions to ask. He did not inquire as to what plans the other might have already budding in his mind, looking to the stealing of their captive sister from the clutches of the Senecas.

Kenton was a man to be trusted when he had such a task on hand. He would sleep on it, and, with the coming of another day, no doubt they might hear just how he expected to go about entering the village of the Senecas, and robbing Black Beaver's wigwam of its latest tenant, the paleface girl whom the young chief had stolen to replace the daughter so mourned by the old squaw, his mother.

CHAPTER XXIV

KENTON'S LIFE WITH THE INDIANS

- "Must we wait for night to come, Bob, before we can make a move?" asked Sandy, as he and his brother sat back of the water curtain that concealed the wonderful cavern discovered by Simon Kenton.
- "Why, what else could be done?" exclaimed Bob. "In the broad daylight, if we left this hiding-place, we might run across some hunting party of Senecas; or, perhaps, a group of other Indians returning to their own country. What a calamity that would prove, Sandy!"
- "Yes, I understand," the younger boy replied, with a heavy sigh; "but how slowly the hours pass. They seem like lead to me. Every minute drags as if it stood for ten. I've tried to sleep; but the terrible position of our poor sister haunts me. And then I get to thinking of father. What if it was his party that the Indians attacked and killed."
- "We can only hope on, and trust that all will come out well in the end," replied Bob, who

only with a most determined effort was able to keep from falling into the same despondent condition that Sandy showed.

Truth to tell, there was good reason for his courage to be put to the test. By some accident Abijah Cook, the companion of Kenton on this long and hazardous trip to the country of the Great Lakes, had overheard some Indians talking, while he lay concealed in a dense thicket near the borders of the Seneca village.

Among other things which they discussed, was the information that a party of palefaces travelling eastward had been taken by surprise, and utterly wiped out of existence. Their scalps even then adorned the lodge-poles of a Shawanee village far to the southeast.

It was true that the one who carried this news had claimed that the party numbered a round ten, as many as the fingers on both hands, but Bob knew how such a thing might easily be stretched in the telling, and, while he pretended to scoff at the idea of their father's little party having fallen victims to the treachery of the red men, deep down in his heart he was conscious of a terrible chill every time his thoughts turned that way.

"But how is it we do not see our good friend,

Blue Jacket? "continued Sandy. "He is not the one to desert us in such a terrible time as this."

- "Never!" exclaimed Bob, positively. Blue Jacket is faithful to the death. You do not see him just now because Kenton sent him to visit the village, and find out how the land lies."
- "But dare he enter there, with Pontiac and all those other chiefs from distant tribes still present as guests of Kiashuta?" asked Sandy, puzzled.
- "Why not," answered his brother, "when that is the very thing to make his coming seem perfectly natural. Blue Jacket is known as a coming man in his tribe. Some day, if he lives, he will become famous, and, Sandy, although I am sorry to say it, outside of our family I do not believe Blue Jacket loves the whites any too much."
- "No," declared Sandy, quickly; "he has lost several dear relatives by the guns of the settlers. He was even engaged in trying to wipe out our little caravan at the time we saved his life, and won his eternal gratitude. I see now what you mean, Bob. He can enter the village of the Senecas, saying that he was on a

mission for his far-away tribe, and, learning of the grand council, stopped to meet Pontiac."

- "And to learn what the outcome of the grand palaver had been, so he might carry the news with him to his own people. I think he must be known to some of the other chiefs, who would vouch for him—Long Coat, the Delaware; Turtle Heart and Bald Eagle, of the same nation; and even Silver Heels, who, like our friend, is a full-blooded Shawanee. I am only worried about one thing, Sandy."
- "Tell me what that may be, then," asked Bob's brother.
- "When Blue Jacket comes face-to-face with Pontiac," the older pioneer boy went on, "will those far searching eyes of the great sachem look deep into his heart, and see that he has a double purpose in coming into the village? They say he has terrible eyes, that can read the secrets of the heart like the pages of a book."
- "But Blue Jacket really has no cause for fear!" Sandy exclaimed. "His heart is with the plans of Pontiac, only, in this case, he would try and save our little sister to us."
- "But," Bob continued, shaking his head seriously, "think what would happen to him if they knew he had been hidden in the sacred

oak, and assisted two palefaces to overhear the council!"

"Well, they are not going to know that, for a while at least," declared Sandy; "unless one of our prisoners happens to get away. We must make sure that so great a disaster does not occur."

"Surely. But here is Simon Kenton coming to join us. I have wanted to ask him many things about the village of the Senecas, where our Kate is a prisoner, and perhaps, while we sit here, waiting for Blue Jacket's return, he may give us some account of what he has seen among the lodges of Kiashuta."

The borderer threw himself down beside them.

"What were you two talking about just now?" he remarked, smiling in his pleasant way, for Kenton was a most agreeable young fellow, with winning manners that made him many friends, even though Boone looked upon him as a firebrand because of his extreme recklessness in fighting the Indians.

"I was just saying to Sandy that, since you have been in the Seneca village several times, you might tell us some of the things you saw there. Is it a very large place; are the Senecas

feeling bitter against the white settlers; and what do they do when not on the warpath?"

"Both times that I was among the Seneca lodges it was in disguise," smiled Kenton, always ready to give information when it lay in his power. "A friendly Indian decked me out in paint and feathers, and, as I speak the language almost as well as one of the natives, I had little difficulty. I was supposed to be a strolling Cayuga, and received as such."

"But on this present expedition you did not venture to go in among the lodges, because of the added danger, I suppose?" Bob asked, deeply interested.

"Yes," Kenton continued; "one night we stole past the guard, and scouted around; but the dogs got scent of us, and we found it best to leave in a hurry. There was more or less of a row; but the Indians doubtless believed that it had only been some bold wild animal that had invaded the village in search of food. We easily covered our tracks, and, after that, decided to simply hang about, waiting for the coming of Pontiac."

"Then you could not know anything about our sister, or the location of Black Beaver's lodge? " asked Sandy, in a disappointed tone.

- "That is true," came the hunter's reply; but all that information we expect the friendly Shawanee chief to pick up right now. He knows his business, and, depend on it, his report will cover the ground."
- "I have always wanted to see the life of an Indian village," Bob went on; "but so far the chance has never come. Sandy, here, was a prisoner once in a Shawanee camp; but, as he was shut up in a wigwam until we managed to get him away, he saw little of what went on. As for me, I only had distant views of the place, and my curiosity was far from satisfied."
- "And, on my part, I know the life of the Indian almost as well as I do that of my own kind," said Kenton, thoughtfully. "Many times have I spent a week among them, studying their ways, which have always had a strange fascination for me. Yes, one old chief was determined to adopt me, and I even had to steal away from his village as though I were a thief. I have hunted with the red men; watched their several dances in the seasons; learned many of their secret ways of curing skins, and drying meat for winter use; studied the magic that their medicine men pretend to employ in healing the sick, and casting out devils by all sorts

of incantations and rattling of sacred gourds. Once I even assisted in securing the venom of the rattlesnake, which was to be used in poisoning the flint arrowheads they expected to use against their foes."

- "I have heard of that more than once, but never met any one who had really seen how it was done," exclaimed Bob.
- "Then I will tell you," Kenton immediately remarked; "for, after all, it is a very simple operation, though terrible enough. When all preparations have been made an extra large rattlesnake is found and brought to bay. As he rests in his coils they proceed to provoke him, by prodding with poles, until he is desperately angry, and launches his flat head out again and again, while his rattles buzz like a locust in the bush."
- "Oh! we have come across many a rattlesnake," observed Sandy, "and have fully a dozen rattles at home to show for it. But they always give me a creepy feeling. I just can't help jumping every time I hear that dreadful warning."
- "Having enraged the snake enough," Kenton went on, "a piece of liver is fastened to the end of a pole, and this is thrust up close to

the coiled rattlesnake, which strikes hard and often at the meat. Later on this is allowed to turn green with the virus, and in this way a supply of poison is secured. But we ought to feel glad, boys, that the custom of poisoning arrows or spear points is as a rule frowned down upon by nearly all the tribes, as being too terrible. For, say what you will, I have found that there is a certain sense of honor among the redskins."

- "Yes, we ought to be glad that is so," declared Bob. "I've known quite a few who received wounds from arrows shot from hickory bows in the hands of Indians, and, had the tips been dipped in poison, they would not now be alive to tell the story."
- "And I myself could show you marks where the feathered barbs have torn my flesh," went on the young borderer, calmly. "After watching that operation with the serpent I was more than a little uneasy the next time I received a wound. But the red men themselves long ago frowned down upon such a terrible process, so we have little to fear in that quarter."
- "Then it will be necessary, if Kate is rescued, that the village be entered under cover of darkness?" asked Bob.

- "Without doubt that will be our plan," said Kenton. "I have been thinking it over, and arrived at a conclusion."
- "Oh! please let us hear it!" exclaimed Sandy, eagerly.
- "We must wait for a windy night, as well as a dark one," the frontiersman went on. "The wilder it is, the more chance we have for success, because we must set fire to the lodges, and start a fierce blaze, so that during the excitement, the girl can be taken away. After they have put out the flames the Indians may believe that Kate has just fled in fear of the danger."
- "I understand what you mean," cried Sandy,

 "and it strikes me that it is a wonderful plan.

 It must succeed; only I'm sorry that we have
 to wait. A windy night may be a long time in
 coming; and how can we hold back?"
- "Oh! at this changing season of the year there are few times when the wind does not blow, more or less," returned Kenton, reassuringly. "Perhaps it may be to-night for aught we know."
- "Don't I just hope so," said the boy. "But I wish you would let us go with you into the village."

"I'm afraid that might be taking too many risks," returned the borderer. "However, we will see, later on. At least, I mean to ask Blue Jacket to help me rig both of you out in paint, so that, in case you are seen, discovery would not necessarily follow."

"Oh! we have more than once done the same ourselves, when playing Indian," said Bob, readily; "and it will not be so hard to carry out the part. But I trust that we may be given a chance to see what the village of Kiashuta looks like, while we wait for you to set the fires, and carry our sister off."

"Sandy, if you do not mind, it is about time we had something to eat," remarked Kenton, turning with one of his rare smiles to the younger pioneer lad. "The fire is smoldering, and can be readily rekindled with a handful of small stuff. This inaction does not keep one from feeling hungry, it seems."

So Sandy, always ready to do his duty, scrambled to his feet, and started toward the other side of the wide cavern, stepping over the figure of Abijah Cook, who was making up for lost sleep while he had the chance.

Pat O'Mara had gone off on a hunt for the day and had not returned.

Five seconds later and the voice of Sandy rang out in wild alarm.

"Bob! Kenton! make haste, or he will get away! It is Armand Lacroix, and he has slipped his bonds! See, he is making for the shelf! Oh! stop him, somebody!"

CHAPTER XXV

A BIRCH - BARK MESSAGE

Even while Sandy was shouting these thrilling words, a figure flitted past Bob and Simon Kenton. It was the agile Frenchman, and he was making at full speed for the shelf where the exit of the strange cavern lay.

Abijah Cook, aroused by the cries, scrambled to his feet, being doubtless under the impression that they had been attacked by a large force of the dusky enemy, against whom his hand had been pitted in continual warfare.

There was a collision, and the borderer measured his length again on the stone floor of the cavern. The fleeing form of Armand Lacroix was just glimpsed as he shot around the corner of rock that lay between the rear part of the cave and the waterfall.

For once Kenton did not happen to have his rifle with him, since he had no reason to dream that he would need it. His first act had been to leap wildly forward in the hope that he might yet snatch the weapon up before the Frenchman could vanish beyond the outcropping of rocks.

Bob had seen that, when Lacroix regained his feet after his collision with Abijah, he held something in his grasp that had not been there before. It was the weapon of the big borderer, which doubtless the cunning French trapper had made up his mind to snatch up even before he started to escape.

Kenton knew just where his own rifle was leaning against the wall, and, as he reached the spot, he snatched it up with a single movement. Then he went flying after the figure of the Frenchman, leaving the two boys dumb with fear lest their plans were now doomed to utter defeat.

Larue and his two companions had witnessed with mingled feelings this dash for liberty on the part of Lacroix. They exchanged many low mutterings among themselves, and, while neither of the boys could understand much French, they felt sure that Larue was furious because the other had not waited to cut their bonds before dashing off, and thus giving them a chance to escape also.

"Oh! what if he gets clear away?" said

Sandy, when several minutes had passed, and Kenton did not return.

- "I hope that may not be," Bob remarked between his set teeth. "For his first act will be to bring the Senecas against us, and, even if we managed to escape, think of what Kate's fate would be."
- "Hark!" cried Sandy, gripping his brother's arm convulsively; "did you hear that, Bob?"
- "Surely," replied the other, endeavoring to control his anxiety as best he was able. "It was the report of a gun without a doubt; though, under here, sounds come but faintly."
- "Yes, but mark that there was only one shot!" continued Sandy. "Whoever fired that did not miss. If it was Kenton, then we have no longer any need of fear lest we be betrayed; but, should it have been Armand Lacroix, perhaps we have lost our best friend, and the whole frontier will mourn the death of brave Simon Kenton."

They sat there waiting. The roar of the waterfall was the only sound that came to their ears. Both of them gripped their guns in nervous hands, and had no heart to exchange further words.

- "Some one is coming," whispered Sandy, suddenly.
- "Yes," his brother added, as he raised his musket so as to be ready for any emergency; "I, too, saw a shadow flit past that bright spot on the wall. Oh!"

Kenton suddenly stood before them. The first thing Bob and Sandy noticed was that the young borderer carried *two* guns! They could easily guess the meaning of such a thing.

- "Here is your rifle, Abijah!" said the returned frontiersman, as he handed the weapon over to his big companion; then he coolly started to reload his own gun.
- "But Armand Lacroix, what of him?" asked Sandy, appalled at the consciousness that one of those dark tragedies, so common on the border, must have just taken place.
- "Fear no ill," said Simon Kenton, calmly.
 "He will not betray us. We are safe yet a while, my brave boys."

Nor would he utter another word at the time to satisfy the terrible curiosity of the lads. They could, however, easily picture what had happened — how swiftly the athletic young borderer had pursued the fleeing Frenchman, and, coming in sight of him, perhaps just as Armand

Lacroix was about to use his gun, had taken a shot himself. His well-known skill with firearms had stood Kenton in good stead once more.

Later on, Abijah told them how Kenton had spent a few minutes in concealing all signs of the tragedy, so that, in case any prowling Indians, attracted by the rifle shot, came around to ascertain what it meant, they would fail to learn anything. Even the trail of himself and the Frenchman from the waterfall to the scene of the final meeting was utterly hidden as Kenton backed once more in the direction of the hidden cavern.

Sandy went on with his preparations for the meal; but his hand was not quite so steady as usual when he contemplated the tremendous consequences that must have followed, had the French trapper escaped.

It was difficult to realize that Armand Lacroix would give them no more trouble; that as he had lived, so had he finally died - by violence.

They were yet eating, when silently Blue Jacket entered the cavern, grave as was his custom. Sandy was immediately wringing his brown hand, and plying him with a multitude of questions. So excited did the boy seem that finally Kenton spoke to him rather sternly.

"Let me find out what has been done, Sandy," he said. "Chief, did you discover where the wigwam of Black Beaver is situated in the village?"

"It lies at further edge, close to region of rising sun," replied Blue Jacket, readily enough; for, while he did not entertain the same feeling toward Kenton that he had in his breast for the Armstrong family, at the same time he recognized, in this friend of the great Colonel Boone, one who held the respect of all hostile Indians on account of his dash and valor.

"Good. That will be of value to us when we start the blaze going," declared the borderer; because the chances are ten to one that the wind will be out of the west, and hence we can begin work far away from that single lodge. As the Indians rush toward the fire, to put it out, they will leave the eastern side of the village unguarded; then we can do what we have planned, and disappear."

"Did you meet Pontiac?" asked Bob, who could not forget his fears for Blue Jacket, should such an encounter take place.

"Blue Jacket ask see um," replied the

Shawanee; "when he exchange greetings with chief, Silver Heels, whom he knows. Some time, perhaps, Blue Jacket may yet follow in footsteps of great Pontiac. If any one man bind the tribes in big league to drive paleface back beyond the hills, Pontiac do it. And the heart of Blue Jacket beats true to his people."

"Did you take note of the village, so as to know where to start the fire in case we are compelled to adopt that method of confusion, under cover of which Kate may be rescued?" Kenton continued.

He purposely brought the name of the girl into what he said, for he saw that the young Shawanee winced at mention of firing the village. Only his devotion to the Armstrong family would induce him to thus play a double part, and turn upon his own people.

- "Blue Jacket did all that," came the answer slowly, as though it were only with a great effort that the Indian brought himself to confess how he had spied on the Senecas, who were allies of his own tribe.
- "You do not think Pontiac suspected you, I hope?" asked Kenton.
- "Not so. Blue Jacket hide feelings. No can tell what um think. Great sachem much pleased

meet Blue Jacket. Say hear good report same. Bob, Sandy, get chance see sister. Nobody look, talk, Kate grind maize in stone. Come 'long again, find this on ground. Bring Bob, him read trail of crazy fly on bark!'

To the astonishment and delight of the boys he suddenly produced a small strip of birch bark from his little ornamented bag where he carried his flints, together with the paints which were used to decorate his face when on the warpath, and various other things dear to the heart of a brave.

Upon the smooth inner surface of the tiny roll of bark Kate had managed to write just a few words, using the juice of the poke berry, and perhaps a splinter of wood in place of a quill.

"" Bob — Sandy, come and take me home to mother. Kate."

Tears came unbidden into the eyes of both boys as they saw these expressive words which had been inscribed on the bark by their dear little sister. They could read between the lines the dumb pain of a heart nearly broken by the extent of the terrible disaster that had befallen the child.

Sandy, less able to contain his feelings than his brother, did actually press the rude letter to his boyish lips; nor was Kenton apt to think any the less of the lad for this open exhibition of grief. He knew the tender love that bound together the three children of David Armstrong.

"Then you found a chance to talk with the maiden, did you, Blue Jacket?" asked the borderer, turning again to the Shawanee messenger.

"Blue Jacket stand by watching her grind in mill. When no one look and none hear Blue Jacket tell how Bob, Sandy come all way from Ohio to save little papoose. Then drop piece of bark, so can make marks for Bob. After some time come again that way. Kate in wigwam, bark lie on ground with trail of wounded fly on back. It is well. She know we come soon. She wait and be ready. Ugh!"

If they asked a score more questions they would hardly have received further information. In his own crude but effective way Blue Jacket had told his story. It needed no embellishment. The boys were able to mentally picture just what had occurred, and it pleased them to think that at least Kate knew of their coming.

She would be able to dry her tears now, perhaps, with her heart thrilled with this new hope and expectation of a speedy rescue.

"I am glad to have a chance to help in saving so brave a girl," remarked Kenton, as he fingered the little roll of bark on which Kate had sent her message. "What would the pioneers be able to accomplish if it were not for such valiant mothers, wives and daughters! If this beautiful country is ever given over to the whites, more than half of the credit will belong to those who loaded the guns, while their men fired them."

In turn Blue Jacket was told about the fate of Armand Lacroix, for, of course, he quickly counted one less among the bound figures lying on the rocky floor. Not by the movement of a facial muscle did he betray what he may have thought; but Bob noticed that, when Kenton was not looking, the young Shawanee cast several glances of admiration in his direction. Such a bold man as Simon Kenton could not but excite the envy and admiration of every adventurous spirit, be he white or red.

So it was that Colonel Boone made many friends among the Indians, and, on one occasion, when he fell into their power, instead of putting him to death, they adopted him into the tribe. He even lived among them for months. Hearing that a heavy force was setting out to destroy Boonesborough, and rendered desperate by the fear that his friends and relatives might thus be murdered, Boone had escaped, and managed to rejoin his kindred in time to assist in the defence of the settlement he had himself started.

The afternoon dragged along. Pat O'Mara came back from his hunt but brought no news. Poor Sandy did nothing, Bob thought, but growl, get up to walk around the confined space of the cavern, lie down again in a vain attempt to coax sleep to his eyes, and in all sorts of ways proclaim his impatience.

But, by degrees, the time passed. They had no means of telling the hour save as the shadows lengthened; the sun-dial they depended on was the dropping of the glowing day god behind the western horizon. And, when it became apparent that the twilight had actually changed into darkness, Sandy breathed a sigh of satisfaction in his brother's ear.

"Now it cannot be long!" he declared.

"Once darkness settles over the land, and surely Kenton will bid us depart from this

place, which I never want to see again; for I have lived and grown old here. But, oh! I only hope there will be plenty of wind! There, he has gone out to see how things look. Let us pray he returns to tell us the wind has risen."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WAR DANCE

- "What of the weather?" asked Sandy, as soon as Simon Kenton once more entered the cavern.
- "So far there is good reason to hope," replied the borderer, cheerfully.
- "You could not make me happier than by saying that!" cried the young pioneer, the anxious expression vanishing from his face. "Then we can expect to get away from here, and start things moving at the village of Kiashuta? May we go now?"
- "Not for several hours," said Kenton, shaking his head.
- "But the wind may die out by then; or something else might happen to upset all our plans?" urged the boy.
- "Not much danger of that, Sandy," Bob put in. "If the wind is blowing fairly now, it will grow stronger before it dies out."
 - "Well said, Bob," declared the borderer;

"for it is bound to do that, as I know from the look of the clouds. Blue Jacket, too, says a storm is brewing, though it may not break until early morning, so we need not fear that the lodges will get wet, and refuse to burn. My plan would be to start the fires just as the gale begins to sweep down. With the rush of the wind, and the roar of the flames, the reds will be half crazy with fear."

He made sure that Blue Jacket was not close by when he said this, because he knew how it would make the young chief wince.

"But what about your plan for dressing us all up to look like the Indians?" questioned Bob.

"We may as well get at that now," Kenton replied, promptly. "I've some paints in my own ditty bag, and Blue Jacket will furnish the rest. As we do not mean to be seen at close quarters, it can be easily fixed. Come here, both of you, boys, and let me begin work."

In a short time the crafty hand of Kenton had daubed enough paint over the faces and hands of the boys to make them look like young warriors of the Senecas. So long as they kept well within the half shadows there would seem

to be little danger that their real identity would he discovered.

Boylike, they rather enjoyed the strange experience. Sandy would have been even willing to venture into the village, and try to mingle with the crowd, had Kenton given his permission; but this the borderer was not likely to do, since he knew what must follow.

After that the rangers decorated one another, so that they too might pass for Seneca warriors if they kept on their guard.

"You see," remarked Kenton, as they sat there eating the evening meal, with only a torch fastened on the wall to give them light, "one thing that is going to help us a heap is the fact that, just now, there are many strange Indians in the Seneca village, more than I have ever seen together, even in Old Chillicothe Town. We can pass for some of those who have journeyed far to listen to the words falling from the lips of the great Pontiac."

An hour later, Sandy was electrified by observing that the borderer had given a signal to Blue Jacket, Abijah Cook and Pat O'Mara, at the same time rising from his seat, where he had been squatted cross-legged on the rocky floor.

"It is time!" said Kenton, in a quiet tone, though not a muscle in his whole body gave evidence of excitement.

"At last!" sighed Sandy, as he hastened to get on his feet, gripping his musket in his fingers.

The borderer spoke a few last words, after which he made both lads pledge themselves to control their eagerness, and promise to obey his orders.

Once out of the hateful cavern, and under the trees, the boys looked about them. They had had more or less experience as woodsmen, young though they were, and it was no great task for either Bob or Sandy to read the signs in the heavens.

Clouds drifted across the sky, coming up out of the west, so that only once in a while were a few stars seen. The wind moaned fitfully in the trees, and gave promise of increasing in strength as the night grew older. Yes, just as Kenton had declared, there was a storm in prospect, though it might not break for several hours.

Kenton immediately took the lead, though Blue Jacket clung to his side as if to advise in case the borderer needed assistance. But Kenton was really as much at home in the forest as the red son of the wilderness. To him all signs were plain to read. He knew just where the Seneca village lay, and how long it was likely to take them to reach it.

They had left the three Frenchmen bound in the cavern. Larue had pleaded to be released, vowing that not one of them would whisper to the Indians concerning the presence of these invaders in their midst. But Kenton refused to take their word. He did not have a very high opinion of these French Canadian trappers as a whole; and feared lest the fellow might betray them just to curry favor with Pontiac, with whom he had quarrelled at the council. Once they were well away, Blue Jacket would find some means of communicating with the Senecas, and tell them of the prisoners in the secret grotto under the cataract.

In Indian file they started for the distant lodges of the Senecas. Winding in and out of the woods, as Kenton picked his course, they left the stream behind them.

Two miles had been placed behind. The boys had known for some time that they were approaching the Seneca town. Lights could be seen ahead, as of numerous fires. Sounds also

came to their ears — voices of warriors chanting; the monotonous beating of the war drum, known as a tomtom; barking of excited curs of which every Indian village boasted its scores, most of them wolf-like in their savage nature; and even the loud laughter of half-grown Indian boys, who were perhaps indulging in foot races, or some other form of rivalry.

Closer still did Kenton lead them. Now and then he would stop, and hold a few words of whispered conversation with Blue Jacket, after which, possibly, his course might change a trifle, as he received advice.

Finally they lay down, and began to crawl through the high grass and scattered weeds and bushes. The hearts of the two boys were throbbing with intense excitement. They could see the numerous skin lodges every time they raised their heads, and it thrilled Bob and Sandy to realize that, in one of the many score before them, the little lost sister might even then be crouching, waiting in mingled hope and fear for her brothers' coming.

Not once did either lad feel the slightest fear, yet they knew well what was likely to be their fate should the Indians discover their presence. Spies they would be deemed, and, after the gantlet running, they might expect death at the stake.

Finally they halted in the last cover on the border of the village. Before them they saw scores upon scores of Indians, gathering as if in expectation of some great game or ceremony.

The crouching figures found space between the drooping twigs of the bushy screen to observe what was taking place.

Kenton whispered something in the ear of Bob, who in turn passed the intelligence on to his brother.

"War-dance!" was what he said, and both lads eagerly watched to see the wonderful spectacle of which they had so often heard, but up to now never found a chance to observe.

A painted post had been driven into the ground in the midst of the cleared space. Around this the Indian braves and chiefs gathered, all facing toward a common centre. Pontiac and some of the visiting head men were given places of honor on a rude platform, where they could remain spectators. And the great sachem was doubtless pleased at being able to observe how his fiery words of exhortation had decided Kiashuta and his warlike Senecas to dig up the hatchet against the paleface invaders.

Fires and torches illuminated the scene, casting their deep red glare upon the dusky boughs of the surrounding pines, and upon the wild multitude of warriors who, fluttering with feathers, and bedaubed with bright paint, had gathered for the celebration of the war-dance.

First of all Kiashuta himself leaped into the circle, brandishing his tomahawk as if rushing upon an enemy. In a loud voice he chanted his own past exploits, after the customary boastful way of an Indian, and then those of his departed ancestors, whose memory he honored.

And, as he thus sang and shrieked, he acted the scenes over again, sending forth the shrill war-whoop with which the foe had so often been terrorized, throwing himself into all the postures of actual combat, striking the post as though it were an enemy, and then tearing the scalp from the head of an imaginary victim.

Long before he had completed his part in the drama another chief had started in to excel Kiashuta; and, by degrees, still more, chiefs and braves, joined in the mad carnival of noise and movement, until the sight was one that neither of the young pioneers would ever forget as long as he lived.

Finally, the whole assembly, as if fired with

sudden frenzy, rushed together into the ring, leaping, stamping, whooping and shrieking. They brandished knives and hatchets in the firelight, hacking and stabbing the air in their great excitement, while at intervals their cries arose to such a pitch that they might have been heard miles away over the lonely forest.

Kenton had undoubtedly witnessed this stirring scene before, and possibly Abijah Cook may also have had that experience; but the two boys stared and trembled as the war-dance grew more and more violent.

Finally the ceremony was over. Kiashuta himself gave a signal that hushed the mad carnival of noise. Once again it was possible for those who lay back of the friendly screen of grass and bushes to distinguish individual sounds.

Bob heard his brother give a long sigh, close to his ear. He knew how eager Sandy had always been to witness strange sights and explore the untracked wilderness. It was easy to understand that the boy must consider that he had just looked upon the most wonderful spectacle that he would ever see in all the days of his life.

But they must not forget why they were there. It had been with no desire to look upon any of the ceremonial dances of the Indians that they had taken their lives in their hands, and crept close to the borders of the hostile village of the Iroquois. Kate—that was the magic name by which they had been led over hundreds of weary miles, scorning peril, and laughing at all manner of privation.

Was the wind really strengthening, or did Bob dream it simply because he wished for such a thing to come about? Now that the racket had died away as suddenly as it had arisen, something like quiet settled down over the village, with its warriors exhausted by the violence of their fierce, assumed fury. And Bob, listening, was sure the sound of the breeze in the tops of the near-by pines had gained something in volume.

He knew how the plans of Kenton had been laid. There was nothing for either himself or Sandy to do, save to remain where they were placed, and wait until their allies had accomplished their undertaking.

The white men were to start the blaze, because it was asking too much of Blue Jacket to expect him to set fire to the lodges of his kind; but the young Shawanee chieftain had agreed, on his part, to steal Kate from the wig-

wam of Black Beaver, and bring her to the appointed rendezvous.

But how long a time must elapse before the excited owners of all these painted lodges would settle down into quiet, so that operations could begin? Sandy knew he must again possess his soul in patience. He was just about to try to whisper something in the ear of his brother when he caught a low hiss.

Undoubtedly Kenton himself was responsible for this warning. It signified that sudden danger hung over their heads. Sandy flattened himself out on the ground as though he were a panther creeping up on its intended prey. And in doing this his ear came so closely in contact with the earth that he was enabled to hear the swish of bushes, and the low patter of feet upon the dead leaves in the forest behind them. Indians were coming, running on the dog-trot for which they have always been famous!

CHAPTER XXVII

PONTIAC'S PERIL

CLOSER came the footfalls.

Bob almost held his breath, as he began to fear that the approaching Indians must actually step upon them, when discovery would of necessity follow. It was a terrible moment of suspense.

But Kenton had anticipated something of this sort, it would seem, when he led his little expedition into that patch of brush. The leading figure turned abruptly aside when just about to jump into the thicket, and those following at his heels did likewise.

Bob, out of the tail of his eye, for he dared not even move his head, counted seven warriors go leaping past. They gave vent to tremendous whoops as they thus burst into the village, and, from the answering cries, it was plain to be seen that they were envoys, sent from some distant Indian settlement to Pontiac.

Again there was more or less noise and con-

fusion, with dogs barking, and many voices raised, asking what it all meant. The Indian messengers were taken into the heart of the village, where doubtless they secured an immediate interview with Pontiac and the head chiefs, after which they would be served a feast of baked dog, provided for the occasion.

Once again Bob and his brother breathed easy. It had, however, been a narrow escape, and they felt that they had reason to feel thankful because discovery was thus averted.

How Sandy would have liked to be able to whisper what was passing through his mind; but he had been warned against this by Kenton, and realized that silence would add to their chance of success.

They no longer lay flat on the earth, for, with the change in conditions, Kenton led the way, once more crouching on his knees, so as to look through the little openings in the bushes.

The hour was growing late, and by degrees they noted that the crowds had begun to disappear from the open spaces between the numerous lodges that went to make up the great village of Kiashuta and his branch of the Seneca tribe. Already had all the squaws vanished from sight, as well as the numerous papooses

and the half-grown boys who had been allowed to witness this wild dance in the hope that it might inspire them with a desire to emulate the fighting warriors as they grew older.

"Listen — the wind!"

Sandy could not help saying this into the ear of his brother, taking advantage of some noise close by, which he believed would muffle the sound of his voice.

Bob had not been unmindful of the fact that the pine tops were now swaying before the breeze. They no longer sighed and moaned, but there was a decided "swish" as they strove to hold their heads up before the rising gusts.

Kenton, too, had taken note of this fact. He knew that it was time he and Abijah and Blue Jacket were going. They must make a detour, and yet arrive on the scene of their contemplated labors before the storm broke.

Bob and Sandy did not attempt to follow. Their duty was to lie still where they were until the alarm was given, and, with the flashing up of numerous fires, to retreat to a certain spot where five chestnuts grew in a clump. Here they would be joined, not only by the two scouts, but by Blue Jacket as well, and the latter

was expected to bring with him the little captive girl, their sister Kate.

Kenton and his companion would have a dangerous mission. They intended to apply the blazing torch to as many of the lodges on the windward side of the village as they possibly could, so that the fire would get such a start that it could not possibly be put out before much damage had been done.

Of course, while they were thus running hither and thither, thrusting their firebrands this way and that, they took chances of being impaled on the spear of some furious brave, or feeling a tomahawk come crashing down upon their heads; but so often had they dared such risks that they gave it slight heed now.

Left alone, the young pioneers began to feel the responsibility of their position. There, just before them, lay the great Indian village, with its hundreds of people, and its scores upon scores of lodges, in each of which rested those who were now declared enemies to the whites.

True, there might be found a few whose skins were not red; but their hearts were even blacker than that of any Indian, for such renegades as Simon Girty hated their own kind as venomously as so many snakes would have done. Driven out of the settlements along the border for various crimes, they had joined their fortunes with the savages, and at all times distanced the most cruel and crafty Indian in their treacherous conduct toward the pioneers.

There was no one close enough now to catch a low whisper, so that Sandy, who felt that he must express his feelings or burst, took occasion to say in the ear of the other:

"Can you give a guess where Black Beaver's lodge lies, Bob?"

Now, that was a matter to which the other had himself given more or less attention. When he surveyed the numerous skin shelters, with their three poles sticking up out of the hole at the top, where the smoke of the fire came forth, he had kept in mind what Blue Jacket told him about the symbolic and crude paintings with which Black Beaver had decorated his tepee.

"When the fires burned their brightest I thought I saw it away off yonder to the right," he answered, in the same cautious tone that would be utterly unheard five feet away, especially while that breeze rustled the waving branches of the overhanging trees.

"Yes, that is to the east, and he said it lay

there," continued Sandy. "But try to tell me which it was. Can you make it out still, Bob?"

"I think so," replied the other, who knew that Sandy simply wished to feast his hungry eyes on the wigwam thus picked out, and try to imagine that he could see the loved form of little Kate beyond its painted walls.

"Look closely," he went on, softly, "and notice that large lodge with the buffalo and the hunter. There, a fire just blazed up, and you can see it plainly. Now, the third one beyond has a double border of pictures on the skin. When the light was good I could see them plainly, and I am sure they are just what Blue Jacket told me Black Beaver had decorated his lodge with."

"I see which one you mean, Bob, thank you." And again Sandy sighed as he glued his eyes on that particular wigwam, which he believed contained the lode-star that had guided him through all the perils hovering in the woods between the Ohio and the Great Lakes.

Then Sandy fell silent again. Several times he gave a quick gasp, as he fancied he caught some movement in the vicinity of that very lodge. Could it be their faithful friend, Blue Jacket, hovering about, and making ready to

strike when the wild alarm called the young Seneca chief hurrying from his lodge to assist in fighting the devouring flames?

Bob believed that enough time had now elapsed to allow the others to reach the stations assigned to them. That the blazing torch of the incendiary was not already in evidence he believed due to one or two causes.

First, Kenton may have concluded that there were still too many warriors moving about in the village. They would be in a position to attack the holders of the firebrands, and, worse luck still, to put out the fire before it had gained sufficient headway.

Then again, the storm, while growling in the distance, did not show signs of bursting upon the lake shore immediately, and its presence was very essential, in order to make the havoc so tremendous that the terrified Indians could think of nothing save the wild fight to prevent the whole village from going up in flames and smoke.

"Hist! yonder come two Indians this way!
Be silent!"

Bob gave this warning because he did not know what moment his brother might attempt to communicate with him again, for Sandy alJust as he had said, a couple of Indians were walking slowly in their direction, seemingly in deep conversation.

Sandy nudged his brother in the side, and managed to whisper, despite the warning he had received:

"One is Pontiac himself!"

But Bob had before now discovered this fact for himself; also that the companion of the great sachem was no other than the warlike Seneca chief, Kiashuta. Perhaps Pontiac intended leaving the village at daybreak, in order to proceed on his travels, stirring up hatred in the breasts of every tribe he visited. And there were many things he wished to communicate to his red brother ere he went away.

They came to a stand not more than forty feet away from the bushes behind which the two Armstrong boys crouched. Sandy had even feared lest they meant to enter the forest at that particular point, and in so doing might stumble on the pair of young spies hiding there.

But Bob had seen that they were really heading for a log that happened to be lying in the open. Upon this they sat down, and for some

little time Pontiac continued to speak in low but earnest tones. It might be he was finding out just how many armed warriors Kiashuta could throw into the field at short notice, when the signal belt reached him that the confederated tribes had risen in their might.

Bob wished they would finish their palaver, and depart. He feared that, should Kenton take a notion to start operations, the presence of these two chiefs so near the hiding-place of himself and Sandy might interfere with their withdrawal, according to the plans laid out.

Again Sandy nudged him to indicate something; but it was only that Kiashuta had arisen and hurried away, going direct to the large lodge in the centre of the village that marked the wigwam of the head chief.

Pontiac remained seated, with his back almost directly toward the spies. His air was thoughtful, as though the weight of many problems rested heavily upon his mind.

By this time the boys had grown accustomed to the sight of the most famous of all Indian chiefs. His presence no longer inspired them with that sensation of awe such as had marked their first glimpse of the magic leader, as he addressed the council under the sacred oak. "I hope he goes away soon!" whispered Sandy, unable to keep utterly still.

"Perhaps we can back out slowly, an inch at a time," answered his brother; for the storm was muttering louder now, and seemed on the point of developing without much waste of time. He began to follow his words with action, wriggling backward, and being careful not to stir the bushes in the least.

Sandy, realizing that his brother was actually moving, also began to work his way back. An inch at a time, if continued for a certain distance, would allow of their making better progress, until they could finally rise to their feet, and glide off to the rendezvous of the five chestnuts.

He was alongside Bob, and still wriggling along, keeping his eyes in the direction where that kingly figure sat upon the log, when the older boy felt his fingers gripping his arm.

Sandy did not utter a single word; perhaps he could not find his voice to do so, he was so shocked by what he had suddenly discovered. Bob, catching some of the same spirit, simply shut his hands tight together, and held his breath, while a low whispered "Oh!" fell from his parted lips.

Just behind the sitting form of Pontiac a bending figure was creeping, and an uplifted hand clutched a terrible club, which the would-be assassin undoubtedly meant to bring down with cruel force on the unprotected head of the war sachem. And to his intense astonishment Bob recognized in this creeping figure Jacques Larue, whom they had left tied hand and foot in the cascade cavern!

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN ALL SEEMED LOST

Sandy Armstrong was an impulsive boy, as has been shown more than once in these pages.

He often acted on a sudden inspiration, and without weighing matters over in his mind. This disposition to do things on the spur of the moment was a part of his nature, and did not spring from the mere fact that he was a lad; for his brother Bob had no such failing.

Kenton had seen it in Sandy, and it aroused a fellow-feeling in the breast of the famous borderer for the young pioneer, because he himself had many times been taken to task by Daniel Boone for showing the same weakness.

Sandy only saw that a scoundrel was creeping up behind a brave man with the intention of doing him a deadly injury. Little he considered that Pontiac towered head and shoulders above every Indian foe the struggling settlers in the wilderness might ever know, and that his untimely death would really be a blessing to the entire white race.

Horror filled his young soul at the dastardly nature of the revengeful Larue's intentions. The pondering sachem was utterly ignorant of the presence of an enemy, as he sat there on that log, waiting for the return of the Seneca chief. Even then the French trapper was towering over the bent figure, his hands grasping that club, as he summoned all his strength for the blow, meaning to make short work of his enemy.

The public insult which Pontiac had put upon him doubtless rankled in the heart of the Frenchman. Making his escape from the cavern, where he had been left apparently securely tied hand and foot, he must have headed for the Indian village in order to betray the plans of the invaders. Then, suddenly discovering the great leader of the tribes seated there alone, an overmastering desire for revenge took complete possession of him.

Bob was himself almost frozen with horror as he saw the drama that was being played there before his eyes. He wanted to shout out, and at least warn Pontiac, so that the chief might have a chance for his life; but somehow it seemed as though his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

Then came a loud report. It was so close to his ear that it almost deafened Bob; but he was conscious of the fact that his brother must have fired the shot.

Sandy had indeed fired, just as he saw the burly Frenchman about to bring down his club on the unprotected head of the sachem.

As we know, the boy of the Ohio river cabin was a splendid shot with that old musket which he carried; but even at such a time he could not find it in his heart to attempt the life of a white man, however much Larue merited such a fate. Consequently he endeavored to prevent the Frenchman's crime by sending a bullet through his uplifted arm.

Instantly all was confusion. It was as though that crash of a gun sounded the signal for an immediate upheaval. Larue's arm fell to his side as, in a panic, he dropped the club, and tried to turn for flight. Pontiac was already on his feet, and, grasping the situation, a yell pealed from his lips as he flung himself boldly upon the back of the French trapper, bearing him to the ground, where they struggled like a couple of angry wolverines.

Scores of braves dashed wildly from their lodges, some calling, others answering, and all

running hither and thither like a pack of hounds searching for a lost trail.

Bob was dazed by what had happened. He realized that probably it meant the complete blocking of the bright plans which their friend, Simon Kenton, had arranged for the rescue of little Kate.

Had Sandy been to blame? Should the reckless boy have restrained his impulse to shoot down the wretch who would slay the great Indian leader in cold blood?

It was no time to ask such questions. They were themselves in great danger. The warriors were constantly widening their circles as they ran, and at any moment one of them might discover the crouching figures of the young pioneers in the grass and weeds.

"Back out, Sandy! Quick, or all is lost!"
Bob managed to whisper hoarsely in the ear of his comrade.

Doubtless Sandy realized how his act was likely to result. Had he been content to allow matters to take their course Pontiac would ere now have been hurried on his way to the Happy Hunting Grounds of the red men; and all this confusion avoided.

It was too late for vain regrets. The thing

was done, and all that remained for them now was to try to escape. If they could manage to get off undiscovered they might effect a reunion with the others, and hide in the forest, waiting for another opportunity to come.

So they started to push backward, hoping that fortune might be kind enough to allow them to reach the thick timber, where it would be easy to glide away unseen by the keen eyes of the red searchers.

Around Pontiac a dozen warriors had clustered. They seemed to understand that a desperate effort had been made to kill the great sachem, whose words had so recently thrilled them in the grand council; for all accounts agree in saying that no Indian ever spoke as did this gifted orator, Pontiac.

Larue was struggling in the hands of several furious braves. They would have made short work of the treacherous Frenchman only that the voice of Pontiac himself prevented his summary execution.

"Lay no hand on him in anger, warriors!" he called out. "Let him be taken to the strong lodge and there kept fast until your chief can decide his fate. It is the will of Pontiac; let none refuse to obey!"

After that no one dared strike the prisoner, who was dragged away shrieking, and wildly defying the man he hated.

All this excitement was in the favor of the two boys. It gave them a better opportunity to push further away from the dangerous vicinity of the log upon which the visiting sachem had been seated when so rudely disturbed by that shot. And it goes without saying that both lads wasted not a second of time in trying to gain the shelter of the woods.

They knew that Kenton must have been discouraged in his plans by this unexpected happening, because there came no sudden alarm of fire, though the wind was already strong enough to have answered his purpose. Perhaps he fancied that, through some unfortunate freak of fate, Bob and his brother had fallen into the power of the Indians; that heavy gunshot would seem to indicate as much, since few among the Senecas carried firearms.

While all these things had happened very rapidly, and it could not have been more than three minutes since Sandy fired; still, the time seemed tenfold as long to the retreating boys. Finally they reached the shelter of the heavier timber, and breathed a sigh of relief.

In those early days the settlers had a saying to the effect that "a white man should not shout until he was out of the woods, nor an Indian until he had gained their shelter." When Bob and his brother experienced a sense of safety after finally reaching the timber, they counted without their host.

Flitting figures were around them, though they knew it not, some of the Indians having hastened away at the first alarm, under the impression that it meant an attack on the part of the whites.

These braves flattened themselves against the earth, and lay like logs until the boys, straightening up, started to glide away. Then there was a whoop, a sudden springing into life of the dusky figures, and, before either Bob or Sandy could make a single effort at self-defence, they were borne down under the weight of their enemies, who were not deceived by the paint with which they had covered their faces.

With hearts as heavy as lead the brave boys were conducted into the village, now a seething volcano. Word had gone around of the base attempt on the life of the sachem who had long been the idol of so many tribes; and

looked upon as the leader sent by the great Manitou to drive the rash white men back into the sea whence they came.

Every minute the indignation increased. They saw in the act a dark plot to cut them off from the leadership of the only general who had ever been able to make an alliance between a dozen tribes, and unite them against the common enemy.

The open space which, but a few minutes before, had been entirely vacant, save for the presence of Pontiac and Kiashuta, was now a seething sea of jostling braves, waving their hatchets and knives, and demanding summary vengeance on the treacherous snakes who had crawled into their midst with such base designs in their hearts.

Sandy shrank back, appalled at the terrible sight. Bob bore himself a little more bravely, though his heart, too, was cold with dread.

"Bob, forgive me!" cried Sandy, filled with remorse because again had his hasty action brought them to the verge of disaster. "I was a fool to do what I did; but I did not stop to think. I only saw that scoundrel about to kill a defenceless man, and something urged me to prevent the murder. I deserve all that is coming to me. If only you could be spared I wouldn't complain."

"Stop that sort of talk, Sandy," answered the other, hoarsely. "I am not worrying over what will happen to me. All I regret is that now Kate will not have any chance to escape. And poor mother will be heartbroken because all of her children have been taken from her."

"Oh! fool! fool that I was!" moaned Sandy, bitterly. "Father always warned me that some day my hasty nature would play me an ill turn. What do you suppose they will do with us now? Some of these braves look so ugly that I do not think we will ever live to see the sun rise again."

"Wait," said Bob, with a trace of encouragement in his voice; but whether he only spoke in this manner to comfort his younger brother, or because he really saw a sudden gleam of hope, Sandy could not guess.

When Bob uttered this one word his eyes were fastened upon the face of Pontiac, who was thoughtfully surveying the prisoners. And perhaps it was something he saw in the countenance of the renowned sachem that encouraged the boy.

Threatening braves pushed around them;

tomahawks were waving in the air above their heads; and awful shouts sounded in their ears.

Sandy closed his eyes, as though unable to face the doom which he feared was so close. Doubtless in that moment of suspense his mind flew to that dear cabin far away, where he knew his mother must be waiting every day for the safe return of her children, and praying that they might be spared to her.

A groan burst from his lips; but it did not spring from fear of the fate that hung over his own head.

"Kate! Mother! Oh! Heaven help them!" Sandy said, again and again.

Still Bob watched the great leader. He seemed to divine that, if help came at all to himself and his brother, it must spring from Pontiac alone. And when he saw the chief suddenly push forward toward the struggling group, where the excited braves were jostling each other about, each anxious to have the glory of finishing the young captives, he had faith to believe that all was not yet over.

Now the voice of Pontiac was heard again, and as before commanding that none dare to injure the prisoners until permission were given.

He stood in front of them now, so close that, had Bob been free to use his arms, and dared, he might have put out a hand and touched the person of the sachem. Long and earnestly did Pontiac look them over. Wonder marked his face when he saw that they were but half-grown lads, striplings who had better have been safe in their cabin far away, rather than here in a hostile land, with a thousand mortal foes around them.

Then Pontiac turned to the heaving crowd of painted warriors, with every wild eye fastened upon his face.

"These paleface boys carry no arms," he said. "Some warrior has the gun of each. Let them bring to me the shooting sticks, that I may examine them!"

And, as he heard these words, somehow the heart of Bob gave a leap for joy.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WORD OF AN INDIAN CHIEF

"What is he going to do, Bob?" demanded Sandy, who had opened his eyes, after a minute or so had passed without the expected blow, and who heard Pontiac's demand that the guns of the prisoners be handed to him without understanding what the meaning of the order could be.

"Watch and see!" replied Bob, in a husky voice, and without taking his eyes off the sachem a second. He himself, as yet, had only a vague suspicion concerning any benefit that might spring from this action on the part of Pontiac.

Almost as in a dream, then, Sandy saw first one musket thrust out to the famous chieftain, and then the second. Pontiac examined them eagerly, and, after handling the gun belonging to Bob, once more gave it back into the possession of the keeper. But, as he raised that which Sandy himself had owned, a look of intelligence flashed across the dark face of the Indian.

He even raised the musket to his nose as though to smell the odor of burnt powder that must have still clung to it after the recent discharge. Then he turned upon the two young prisoners.

"Yours?" he demanded, his flashing eyes fastened on the astonished face of Sandy, just as though he had been able to read the nature of both lads in that single earnest look, and understood how impulse swayed one more than the other.

Sandy might have wished to deny all ownership of the weapon; but somehow he was unable to do so, with those impelling eyes fastened upon him. So, still unable to use his tongue, he simply nodded his head.

"You shoot at French trader?" continued Pontiac.

Another nod in the affirmative answered him; and then Bob saw a change begin to spread over the dark features of the chief. He looked at Sandy; but his brother failed to grasp the wonderful meaning of the miracle that had been wrought in their behalf. To his mind all this talk only served as a forerunner to the dreadful fate that was surely to be their portion.

"Why white boy shoot French trapper?" asked Pontiac.

Realizing that Sandy was unable to frame a coherent reply, Bob boldly took it upon himself to make answer.

"You ask why, great Pontiac?" he said.
"Because he could not lie there and see a cowardly snake creep up behind a brave man to strike him in the back. He sent his lead into the arm that held the warclub, and saved the life of Pontiac!"

Then, Indian though he was, the great Pontiac smiled. Perhaps he understood how these paleface boys must have known that, if the traitorous Frenchman had been allowed to carry out his will, it would have been much to the advantage of the border settlements; but that Sandy, unable to control his impulse to rebuke such rank treachery as Larue exhibited, had been unable to hold his fire.

Pontiac turned to the surging crowd of Indians. He held up his hand, and every shout was stilled; even the murmuring ceased, such was his magnetic influence over the wild spirits of hot-headed young warriors whom their own chiefs could not restrain.

"Listen!" he said, in a voice that reached

easily to the further extremity of the gathered throng. "Pontiac sat on yonder log. Your chief Kiashuta had left him to seek for something that was in his lodge. In the mind of Pontiac many things dwell to give him cause for thought. He heard not the coming of the snake in the grass who crawled up behind, and swung aloft the club with which he expected to dash out the brains of a chief.

"Listen. In the bushes and the grass lay two paleface boys. They had guns. They had come many miles from their cabin on the running water to the south. They had no reason to love Pontiac, who has ever been the enemy of their race; but they had hate in their hearts for a snake that could sting in the heel. So, quickly did this gun speak. The arm that was raised fell helpless. And then Pontiac closed with the treacherous Frenchman.

"Listen yet again, warriors. Had it not been for this paleface boy, where now would be your leader? How could Pontiac strike the flint that will make the whole border blaze with fires, if he lay here on this ground, dead?"

He looked around him as though expecting an answer; but not a single voice was raised. Slowly the truth was penetrating the brains of

those who heard. They understood that, no matter what his motive may have been, the paleface boy had saved the famous chieftain to those who hung upon his every look or word, as though he had charmed them with his magic.

"Release them!" Pontiac continued, making an imperious gesture toward the warriors who were clutching the two lads; and immediately they hastened to obey his will. "They belong to Pontiac; let one of you from this hour lay so much as a finger on them at his peril!"

When Sandy heard these words he seemed to regain his power of speech once more, for he clutched Bob's arm convulsively as soon as he found himself free, and exclaimed:

"Bob, do you hear that? He says we are his prisoners, and that we will not be harmed! Oh! if only we could get him to give us Kate now, what a blessed thing it would be! Perhaps after all, Bob, my hasty nature did better for us than all the planning. Ask him if he will help us, won't you, Bob? 'Strike while the iron is hot,' father always says. Speak to him, now.'

But Bob held back, for he saw that the chief had more to say, since he was once again turning toward them. To the delight of the boys he gravely held out his hand, white man fashion, for Pontiac had been brought up among the French, and knew almost as much of the white men's ways as though he had been born a pale-face.

"We are friends," he said, as he pressed each hand firmly. "You have saved the life of Pontiac. Ask what favor you will, and, if it is in his power, so shall it be granted. First tell me what you seek, so far away from your home?"

"In a cabin, where the swift water runs between the hills, lives our mother," said Bob.
"Our father has gone over the big hill to Richmond to bring back with him some of the things a white woman needs. Besides my brother and myself, there was one child, a sweet girl, about so high," and he held his hand below his shoulder to indicate that his sister was much shorter than himself.

Pontiac bowed his head gravely to indicate that he understood what the boy was saying.

"One day there came some Senecas to the settlement," Bob went on, eagerly. "They held up their hands in the peace sign, and we met them as friends. They told us they had been on a long journey into Kentucky, to visit

another tribe. They were without tobacco, and their stock of maize had dwindled low. We gave them of each, enough to last until they could reach their lodges on the Great Lakes.

"But one young Seneca, who bore the feather of a chief in his hair, looked long on the sweet face of the white girl. He remembered that in his lodge, far away, no longer the voice of his own sister was heard; and that the old squaw, his mother, mourned each day for the one who was not.

"So he made up his mind to steal the paleface girl, and bear her away to the village of the Senecas on the big water to the north. When my brother and myself were in the forest hunting for meat he stole our sister away. We have followed him from the rushing Ohio to the Great Lakes. Our sister is here. Will the great Pontiac keep his word by giving her back to our charge, and letting us depart for the cabin where a mother mourns?"

Bob knew how to put the case before the one who must be their judge, so that, as an Indian, Pontiac could grasp it readily; and he saw from the face of the other that he had succeeded in his effort. When an Indian gives his word it is ever afterward sacred.

"Listen!" said the chief, impressively.
"Look around you. There are many Senecas here, braves and chiefs. Does the paleface boy see the one who took tobacco and maize from the white man's hand, and then stole his daughter?"

"Yes!" exclaimed Sandy, finding his voice.
"I saw him just then, among those Indians yonder. There, he is trying to steal away; for he fears the frown of the great and just Pontiac. It is Black Beaver!"

The young chief, seeing that escape was useless, returned, and, standing before Pontiac, folded his arms across his naked chest. Words in the Indian tongue passed quickly between them. Black Beaver seemed defiant at first; but presently he came under the persuasive eloquence of the marvellous orator. He let his chin fall on his breast, and finally, when Pontiac dismissed him with an imperious gesture, the subdued young chief stalked away, heading straight for his wigwam.

"When he comes back he will bring the white girl," said Pontiac. "She shall go with the brave young boys who have sought her so far; and not a warrior will lift a hand to do them harm. More than this, because of what

you have done this night, you and your family are forever the friends of Pontiac. Danger and death will never come near your cabin while he lives. There will be a dead line drawn about it, and woe to the Indian who molests the friends of the chief. I have spoken!"

Loudly did his voice ring out as he said these thrilling words that would never be forgotten by either of the two lads as long as they lived. And far and wide would the command be sent that the little brood of David Armstrong was to be immune from all the perils of an Indian war, even though flame and destruction swooped down upon their nearest neighbor.

"Look! he is coming back, and our sister is with him!" cried Sandy, unable to restrain his delight at sight of the one they loved so dearly.

Black Beaver did not show any emotion as he drew near. He realized that, when Pontiac spoke, it was for him to obey. And as a true Indian, he was ready to accept the fortunes of war, no matter how it hurt.

The Indians made a passage-way to allow them to approach. Pontiac himself took the trembling hand of the frightened girl, and led her to where her two gallant brothers stood with outstretched arms.

"Weep no more, paleface girl. You are going home to the white squaw who mourns in the cabin on the bank of the swift water," said Pontiac, as he released her in front of the boys.

Another instant and Kate, with a cry of joy, had flung her arms about the neck of first one brother and then the other, while Pontiac stood and watched the happy reunion without his face expressing the feelings that must have been struggling in his heart; for so has an Indian been trained never to betray emotion.

How like magic had the scene been changed! Only a few minutes before and poor Sandy was deeply dejected, in the belief that his hasty and ill-advised act had forever ruined their only chance for a rescue. And now they stood there, not only free, and with their dear sister given into their charge, but safe in the pledged friendship of the most powerful of all Indians, Pontiac himself.

"It seems like a dream, Bob!" cried Kate. "I can hardly believe it to be true. How did you manage it, you and dear Sandy? Oh! how happy I am to think that soon I shall see my own mother again! Not that Black Beaver has been cruel to me. He tried to be a brother after his way. I am sorry for him; but there is no

one can take the place of father, mother, Bob and Sandy."

"In good time you will hear it all, Kate," said Bob. "It is a strange story. But I wonder whether Pontiac will extend his favor to our good friends who have come with us to try and influence Black Beaver to give us back our sister. The whites and the Senecas are at peace, for the hatchet has not yet been dug up between them, so we hoped to win Kiashuta to our side; to have him say that Black Beaver had done wrong when he smote the hand that fed him."

Pontiac heard what he said, for he immediately gave the assurance Bob requested.

"If others have come with you to bring the white girl back, they, too, shall not be harmed until they have reached the swift water. Because they are your friends, Pontiac has said this. So let them appear. They shall walk among us in safety, for the word of the chief is given."

But, though Bob raised his voice and called, none of the other four cared to accept the invitation to come into the village and meet the sachem of the Sacs.

Perhaps it was just as well. Both Simon

Kenton and Pat O'Mara were well-known Indian fighters, and belonged to a class of men who threatened to be thorns in the side of Pontiac in his ambitious designs to head a new confederation of tribes.

Doubtless they would be quickly recognized by some of the Indians present from other tribes; and even the word of Pontiac might not keep these warriors from seeking to avenge their kin who had fallen in times past before the rifles of Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton and their fellow borderers.

CHAPTER XXX

SAFE AT LAST

- "WE must get away from here without delay, Sandy," said the elder of the young pioneers, after exchanging a few more words with Pontiac.
- "Shall we accept the offer of Pontiac," asked Sandy, "and make for the river under the guard of his men?"
- "No," replied Bob, quickly; "for many reasons that must not be. He has promised to give us a totem flag that will warn any wandering band of Indians we may happen to meet that we are friends of the great Pontiac, and must not be disturbed. And I have promised him that it shall always be kept in our own cabin, only to be shown in case of any uprising."
- "Then we must try to find Kenton, Pat and Blue Jacket?" questioned Sandy, who was fairly wild to be away; for he seemed to fear lest their late good fortune turn out to be a dream, from which they might be rudely awakened.

- "Yes," Bob went on; "and if we go soon I believe we will run across them at the place Kenton appointed. They will wait there for us the balance of the night, I feel sure."
- "What do you think they believed must have happened, Bob? "Kate in turn asked.
- "Who can say?" her brother answered, shaking his head, as though puzzled. "Fancy how astonished they must have been when all this racket broke out, before they could make ready to start the fires, or Blue Jacket get among the lodges to steal Kate, here, away. And then, if Kenton was near enough to see Pontiac take our hands in his, how he must have stared!"
- "But it seems all for the best, to me," said Sandy, softly; "even my foolish rashness in firing without thinking. We have made a powerful friend in Pontiac, and perhaps saved our mother and father from the doom that comes to so many settlers in the wilderness. And here is Kate given over to our charge without either of us having to shoot down a single Indian. Yes, Heaven was kind to us."
- "Here comes the great sachem, and bearing in his hand the totem flag which is to stand between us and harm," remarked Bob, as he saw

Pontiac approaching them, followed by a retinue of jostling braves and chiefs.

The object which he thrust into the hand of Bob was a beautifully made wampum belt that had been attached to a stick. It was of unusual wideness, and the symbols represented in its barbaric splendor undoubtedly told a story that every warrior could readily understand.

It seemed as though every brave in the great Seneca village had gathered to hear what the chief among ten thousand Indians had to say, as he presented this badge of friendship to the young pioneers. Some scowled as they surveyed the palefaces; but the majority seemed friendly, because they realized that as Indians they owed a debt of gratitude to the white boy who had saved the life so valuable to their cause.

"Hear!" said Pontiac, elevating his wonderful voice, even as he raised his dusky arm with the air of a king, "these are the friends of Pontiac. Let no Indian lift a hand against them, or dare to follow as they pass over the back trail to the swift water. Where this totem hangs, that cabin is secure from the torch, those inmates safe from the hatchet, the flaming arrow, the knife. So long as Pontiac lives let there be peace between the red men and those who bear the name of Armstrong. I have spoken."

Once again he thrust out his hand, and gravely shook that of each of the whites, not even forgetting Kate. And, in the stirring times to come, when the whole border would ring with the wonderful, masterful ability of this organizer and red leader, perhaps there would arise days of alarm when Bob and Sandy would rejoice to know that the word of a chief may never be broken.

So they took their parting look at the village on the Great Lakes, and plunged into the forest. Not a single brave dared to follow them, so great was their fear and respect for the mighty sachem of the Sacs.

Straight to the meeting-place of the five chestnuts Bob led the way. Unerringly he took his companions there, and at the first signal call Kenton and the other three made their appearance.

- "What does this magic mean?" asked the borderer, when he saw who was the companion of the Armstrong boys.
- "Sure it makes me think I do be draming!" declared Pat O'Mara, as he wrung the hands

of those he loved so well; nor did Kate hesitate to throw her arms about the neck of this faithful friend of her parents, so wild with delight was she to see some one from home.

"Sandy did it," replied Bob, hastily, only too glad to tell what a wonderful change in their fortunes the hasty act of his brother had effected. "He stopped Larue from bringing down a club on the head of Pontiac as the chief sat on a log, lost in thought. And, because of that, Pontiac has called us his friends. This totem flag will warn every red-skinned warrior to injure us at the risk of making the chief his deadly foe. And the Armstrong cabin will never be put to the torch, or a single inmate harmed by an Indian so long as Pontiac lives!"

Loud were the expressions of astonishment on the part of the others. Kenton, who saw himself reflected on a small scale in the quick-tempered Sandy, grasped hold of the boy, and shook him almost fiercely by the hand; after which Pat and Abijah, yes, even the undemonstrative Blue Jacket, followed suit.

"It seems almost too good to be true," cried the delighted Kenton. "Not but that it would have been a great thing for the struggling border settlements if Pontiac had been slain here

and now; yet how wonderfully that shot won our cause. But what is this you tell us of Larue? We left him yet a prisoner in the cavern back of the cataract. We must see to that!"

He immediately started for the stream, and, as it would not be much out of their route, as they headed for the far-distant Ohio, both boys were quite willing. Besides, they were curious to learn just how the wily French trapper had slipped his bonds.

On the road to the waterfall Kenton asked many questions. He, together with his companions, had been stunned when the uproar burst forth, just before they were ready to begin operations. But all was made plain now, and, while Simon Kenton would have been happier had he found himself in the thick of the fray, he could not complain at the way things had turned out.

They found the two French trappers still where they had been left. All they would say was that Larue had seemed to suddenly break loose, and had basely left them, possibly in his haste to reach the village and give the alarm, not wishing to linger long enough to effect their release.

[&]quot;The tricky Frenchman rolled into this pool

of water, and let his bonds soak," said Kenton, after he had made an examination. "When wet, the deerskin thongs stretched enough for him to work loose. He was afraid we might come back and secure him again, so he fled without stopping to so much as lend a helping hand to his mates."

"Yes, and upon reaching the village he must have seen Pontiac sitting there alone," said Bob, in turn. "Remembering how the great chief had struck him in the face, and humiliated him at the grand council under the big oak, he was unable to resist the temptation to creep up and try to obtain revenge. In doing it Larue never suspected that he was playing right into our hands."

"If the Indians only knew that we listened to what was said at that same council," remarked Kenton; "they might not be willing to let the rest of us escape so easily."

"But what shall we do with these two men?" asked Bob, thoughtfully. "We can't leave them here, for perhaps Larue may be put to the stake with the dawn, and the story of their captivity would never be known. The Indians avoid this spot, Blue Jacket says, as the waterfall is believed to be haunted by the spirits of their an-

cestors, who call out constantly, and try to make the red children understand what they are doing in Manitou Land."

"No, we will take them along with us," determined Kenton. "Some days hence we can let them go free. By that time they could not harm us by returning to the Seneca village, and telling what they know of the council spies.

They lost no time in starting. Though Kenton knew that Pontiac's totem belt would probably be able to protect them, he was, nevertheless, anxious to be well on the way to the Ohio.

So, for several days they journeyed; after which the two French trappers were let go, with a warning that they would be roughly treated if they ever again showed themselves near the settlement on the river bank.

And one day the little company arrived safely at home. Great was the rejoicing of Mrs. Armstrong. The entire community gathered around that humble home in the clearing to hear the story of the wonderful journey. And every hand had to touch the wampum belt of Pontiac that was to stand between the Armstrongs and peril, in case of another Indian uprising.

Time passed on. It proved too late in the fall for the expected flame to develop; and

from their scouts the settlers learned, much to their relief, that the uprising had been postponed until spring. Of course that did not mean they would be free from interference, because the Shawanees were always on the warpath, and the hatchet remained dug up between them and the encroaching whites.

Bob and Sandy went on their way, gathering the pelts that they found in their traps. Often they talked over the adventures that had marked their journey to the land of the Great Lakes. Sandy was more determined than ever to lead the life of an explorer, and follow in the footsteps of the bold and resourceful hero whom he fairly worshipped, Simon Kenton.

"Some day," he would say, as they thus talked and exchanged confidences, "I mean to set eyes on that wonderful river away to the west, the mighty Mississippi, under which rest the bones of the bold discoverer, De Soto. I will never rest happy, Bob, until I can say that I have seen the grandest river in all the world."

"Well," replied his brother with a smile, "perhaps I may yet conclude to go with you, Sandy. It is time our people knew more about what the French traders are doing in that region, establishing posts for dealing with the

Indians. But in a few days, now, we ought to hear something of father."

"Yes, winter is here, the snow is thick, and it is nearly time," sighed Sandy; "and let us hope the good fortune that followed us all the way to the far north, will bring him back to mother, safe and sound."

Though neither of them could see just how their ambition was to be realized, there was a way developing, and, in a new story concerning the fortunes of Bob and Sandy, to be called: "The Young Pioneers of the Mississippi," we will have considerably more to narrate in connection with the fortunes of the two lads.

One afternoon there was a loud shout heard close to the Armstrong cabin; and a train of four horses was discovered heading from the main settlement, followed by a score of men and women, all greatly excited.

Of course it was David Armstrong, returned with a store of necessities that must delight the heart of the good housewife, who, however, was ten times happier over the safe home-coming of the man she loved so fondly, than because of anything the newly-recovered money could buy.

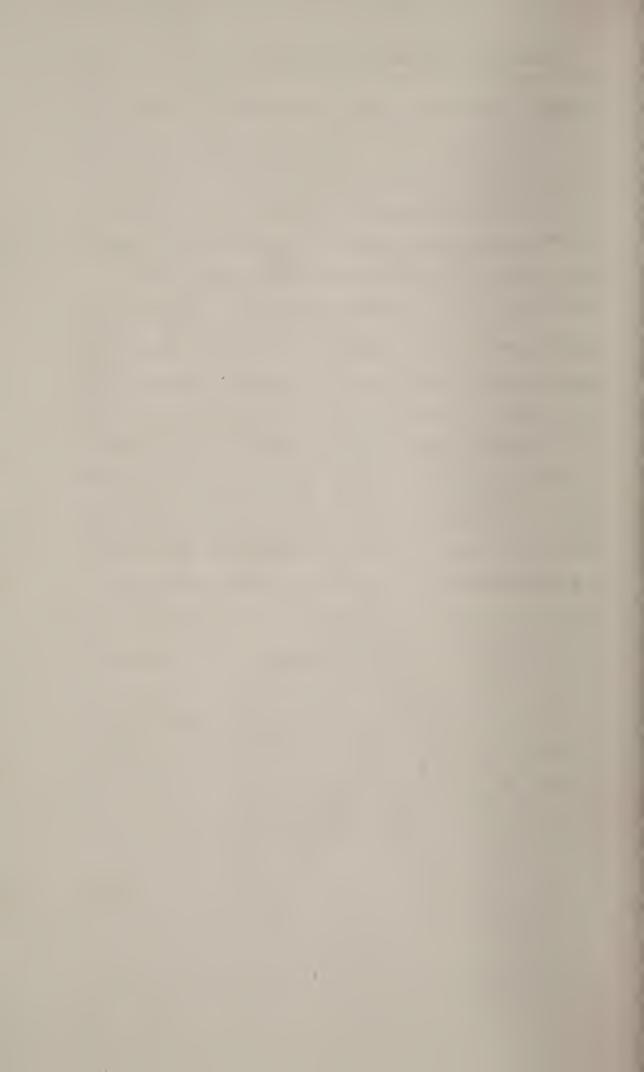
They had a great time of feasting and re-

joicing. The boys were compelled to narrate every incident connected with their eventful journey in search of Kate; and, as Pat O'Mara still hung around, assisting Bob and Sandy in their trapping expeditions, he was able to add many little touches to the wonderful story.

So the winter which they had dreaded so much proved to be a period of joy to the whole settlement on the Ohio. Mr. Armstrong would often take up that magic wampum belt of the great sachem, Pontiac, and fondle it reverently, as his imagination pictured that stirring scene when, with his apparently ill-advised shot, Sandy made a friend of the powerful leader, and thus insured the safety of those he loved.



THE END.



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